



Swale Borough Council ensures compliant document retention and disposal



Civica's Digital360 Disposal module automates disposals in line with customer expectations and regulatory requirements

Swale Borough Council in Kent looks after the needs of some 145,000 residents. Each year, around 2,500 people claim housing benefit and council tax support. The council uses Civica Documents electronic document management (EDM) system to store the related case files, whose contents must be removed on expiry to meet regulatory requirements. Given the effort and risk involved in manual disposals, the council has automated the process using Civica's Digital360 Disposal module.

Protecting customer information

To meet customers' needs with minimum delay, the council processes new claims for housing benefit and council tax support as swiftly as possible. Case files, including completed forms and supporting documents provided by claimants (such as bank statements and payslips), are scanned for storage in the council's Civica Documents system.

Benefits

- ▶ **Prompt deletion of expired documents** with regular automated disposal routines
- ▶ **Simplified compliance with the council's document retention policy**, and avoidance of fines and other liabilities for non-compliance with data protection regulations
- ▶ **High levels of confidence in the Digital360 Disposal module** through ease of use, user-specified disposal parameters, and 'safeguard' feature.

The council's data and document retention policy allows scanned images to be kept for six years. Drawn up in line with the current Data Protection Act, the policy is designed to reassure customers that the council doesn't store information about them for longer than necessary for its lawful purpose.

Until a few years ago, it wasn't easy for the council to remove images whose retention period had expired. Although the images were securely hidden from view in the system, they were still held on the servers.



6 million expired
documents disposed
over 3 years



Improved
performance and
cost savings



Peace of mind
for customers

"The Digital360 Disposal module does what it says on the tin. If you set the right parameters, you can't go wrong. We're very confident using it."

Colin Gibbs, Revenues and Benefits Officer,
Swale Borough Council

"We'd been using the Civica Documents system for around 15 years, so were storing millions of images," says Colin Gibbs, Revenues and Benefits Officer at Swale Borough Council.

As a result, the infrastructure that supported the application was creaking under the load. "We knew we needed to delete the older images to streamline the servers, but doing that manually would have been a daunting task, and potentially fraught with risk," says Colin.

Secure automated disposals

Fortunately an automated solution was available, in the form of Civica's Digital360 Disposal module. The module automates the secure disposal of data, processes and documents from the Civica Documents system in line with user-specified parameters, and optimises the freed-up server space for reuse.

Swale Borough Council used the Disposal module to remove images from the Civica Documents system that were more than six years old. The council quickly familiarised their teams with the module and carried out user acceptance tests, before finalising configuration of the automated disposals routine.

"The Disposal module was exactly what we needed," says Colin. "It made it quick and easy to securely dispose of nearly 10 years' worth of documents and data."

Removing so many items at once freed up plenty of server space for new documents — avoiding the need to replace or supplement storage, and improving the performance of the Civica Documents application.

"In the unlikely event a document gets removed in error, the safeguard period gives you more than enough time to restore it. We've never had to use it, but it's an example of how well the Digital360 Disposal module is designed."

Colin Gibbs, Revenues and Benefits Officer,
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A flexible solution, adaptable to future needs

Swale Borough Council maintains its policy of retaining documents for no longer than six years. The automated disposal routine defined by the council runs four times a week to remove items from the system as soon as they reach the end of their retention period.

This ensures the council complies with its retention policy and avoids the potential for fines or other liabilities. In addition, the council's customers can be confident their data and documents are deleted in a safe and timely way, with no risk of loss or misuse, or that out-of-date information will be retained.

"The Disposal module does what it says on the tin," says Colin. "If you set the right parameters, you can't go wrong. We're very confident using it."

Taking advantage of the Disposal module's 'safeguard' feature, the council has built in a six-month buffer period between a document's removal and its actual deletion. "In the unlikely event a document gets removed in error, the safeguard period gives you more than enough time to restore it," explains Colin. "We've never had to use it, but it's an example of how well the Disposal module is designed."

Swale Borough Council's legal team is currently working through the implications of the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), to understand whether complying with it requires any revisions to its retention policy and disposal process.

The latest version of the Digital360 Disposal module incorporates functionality that supports GDPR requirements, such as the 'right to erasure', to streamline organisations' compliance with the regulation.