

Prescient+ super-user task force facilitates Surrey Council's switch to paper-light hot desking office



An all-too-familiar scenario for many local authorities, a 'public spending review' undertaken in 2012 at Surrey County Council identified an essential requirement for cost savings across departments, including its legal team.

Andrea Kilby, Legal Services Practice Manager, explains how *"repeated budget cuts over the past three years means that our in-house legal division needs to find innovative ways of delivering services to keep driving costs down"*.

At the same time as these budget cuts, Surrey Council's legal team were faced with increased volumes of work. *"Recently we've seen a 30% rise in child protection cases alone"*, continues Andrea. *"So we have a heavier workload and need a system to help us manage cases in hand as well as understand where we're spending time"*.

Using existing systems more widely

As existing users of Civica's software for time recording, Surrey Council saved electronic documents onto a shared network drive, and printed and stored into a corresponding paper filing system.

"Instead of just having an electronic system for time recording", adds Andrea. *"We wanted all our other legal processes to be electronic too. We reviewed legal software suppliers and visited three client sites to see the Prescient+ software running in a live environment. Civica was a natural choice because staff were already comfortable with it. We feared lack of buy in if we migrated to another solution entirely. Another key prerequisite was the ability to bespoke the software and Civica came top for customisability so we purchased additional modules for document bundling and matter management"*.

Super-users trained to streamline the roll out

As the employees at Surrey Council were familiar with Civica for time recording purposes, training users on the extra modules was straightforward. To streamline roll out of the new features even further, super users were elected to assist less confident users with the transition to full electronic working.

"We set up a super-users task force", comments Andrea. *"They invested 9 months into preparation for go live. Part of our comprehensive project plan was establishing a completely bespoke set up, including creation of over 1,000 letter templates and precedents. This background work was lengthy but our efforts have paid dividends because Prescient+ works as we work"*.

The document bundling module in Prescient+ is a tool to automate the otherwise repetitive manual method of producing court bundles with sectioning, page numbering, indexing and pagination of documentation dragged and dropped into the bundle. Prescient+'s matter management module draws together all information relating to a matter into one central document register.

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Andrea Kilby
Legal Services Practice Manager
Surrey County Council

“Court bundle collation takes our central support team a fraction of the time it used to”, explains Andrea. “With matter management, we can produce letters and find information quickly because files are stored within the electronic case record. We’ve also established naming conventions which, coupled with our template library, makes the search for information even easier and introduces uniformity to document formatting and titling. We’re operating as a unified group”.

Working more flexibly in a paperless system

“Before, with paper files, our fee earners had to cart huge folders to work at home so that they’d have the case history with them”, says Andrea. “Now they have access to this data over the internet. We’ve kitted them out with laptops and the office has been turned into a paper-light hot desking site instead, saving us storage and desk space”.

Complementary account management and technical support is provided by Civica to its Prescient+ clients.

“It’s important to look at what’s offered in terms of helpdesk support”, adds Andrea. “We email Civica with lower priority queries and phone if it’s urgent. They understand the urgency and respond appropriately within the same working day”.

Andrea urges local authorities facing similar challenges to *“take a look at the Civica system as part of a bigger cultural shift”.*

“Our identified cost savings have been realised and Prescient+ was a significant contributory factor”, concludes Andrea. “That’s because the new modules were installed alongside other changes. We worked at our own pace and invested a vast amount of resources to capitalise on the bespoke aspects of the software. Other local authorities should do the same by putting project emphasis into Prescient+ in the early stages to reap the rewards later on”.