



Case Study: Durham County Council

Saving time, money and stress with Iken Court Bundling

In April 2009, Durham County Council and the seven District Councils joined together to form a “single all-purpose Unitary Authority”. The new Durham County Council has been charged with improving services to the citizens of County Durham by being more efficient in order to reduce costs.

The Council's busy Legal team is actively engaged in this process and is constantly looking for more efficient ways of working, especially in the current financial climate. Two years ago, the childcare division of the legal team found a technological solution to assist with a particularly onerous task: the creation of court bundles, which was a considerable drain on both staff time and monetary resources. After witnessing a demonstration of Iken Court Bundling software at a neighbouring authority, the team put forward a business case and implemented the software in June 2007. Business Manager Elizabeth Wilson explains:

“A colleague at a nearby council had told us that Iken Court Bundling had enabled them to make significant savings - in time, resources, everything really! When we went to see the system we were very impressed. It was such a different way of working and we knew that it was what we'd been looking for.”

Here, Elizabeth explains how Iken Court Bundling has supported the childcare team in its continuous improvement over the past three years.

“Iken Court bundling takes the headache out of the bundling process”

Prior to implementing the Iken software, the creation of court bundles at Durham was an entirely manual, paper-based process that was both time-consuming and stressful.

“Before we started using Iken, the creation of bundles was one of the most time-consuming administrative tasks staff had to do. It involved photocopying huge numbers of documents, paginating by hand, and vast amounts of printing, especially as for every set of proceedings we typically had to distribute ten copies of each bundle. With Iken it's quick and simple to assemble electronic bundles and paginating and indexing is done automatically, which is saving us a lot of work.”

“It's helped us cope with the ever-increasing size and number of bundles”

As a direct repercussion of the Baby P case in late 2008, the childcare team have experienced a substantial rise in the number of court proceedings taking place. When combined with an ongoing increase in the breadth of evidence needing to be included in each bundle, this has presented them with a significant business challenge.

“Proceedings are getting more and more complex as the need for expert testimony increases, which in turn results in bigger and bigger bundles – typically they are now around 2,000 pages long. Paper-based bundling on this scale resulted in huge storage problems as we had simply run out of space to put the bundles, so we



ended up destroying all duplicate copies, only to have to spend time producing new ones when proceedings were re-opened. With Iken we now keep complete electronic copies of bundles, so we're making considerable savings on paper, storage space and production time. Apart from cost savings, Iken also helps us to keep pace with the increase in our workload."

"The software saved us over £10,000 in the first year alone"

Like the majority of local authority functions, the legal team at Durham works within a tight budget, especially given the current economic situation. When asked whether the time and storage savings she has mentioned have resulted in corresponding financial savings, Elizabeth responds:

"Definitely – in fact we saved over £10,000 in the first year of using Iken Court Bundling alone, partly because it saved us so much money in paper and postage, not to mention staff time. In that way the system quickly pays for itself; it really is spend to save."

"Late additions are no longer a problem"

One of the most persistent difficulties for the childcare team when creating court bundles was the issue of late additions – the receipt of additional documents for insertion once a bundle had already been indexed and paginated. With Iken Court Bundling users can add late additions with sub numbering if required. The touch of a button repaginates and reindexes without affecting later document numbering, if that is the preference.

"The inevitable late additions used to cause headaches: in order not to have to repaginate the whole bundle you would have to handwrite subdivisions on the new pages, so it ended up being untidy. Now we don't even mind if there is a late addition, as Iken repaginates the index without the need for manual re-numbering and lots of correction fluid."

"The process has considerably reduced the risk of inconsistent documentation"

The fact that bundles are constantly being updated during the course of their construction also created a further challenge for all the parties involved: trying to ensure that everyone was working with identical sets of documentation.

"Prior to implementing Iken, all parties involved in a case would create their own court bundle using a shared index, which risked them not having identical replications of the bundle. Now, as soon as court dates are set, we can email the bundle to all parties involved and when it is updated, we can either send out a complete new version or select the relevant sections and just send those. It's greatly improved consistency."

Onwards and upwards

Having already delivered significant benefits to the childcare team, Durham now plans to extend the use of Iken Court Bundling so that the electronic bundling service is also offered to the rest of the legal function.

"We thought we were using Iken to its full capacity, until someone approached us to see whether it could be used for bundles in respect of planning enquiries or employment tribunals. We've gradually realised that the system can be adapted to cater for many different uses. We're looking forward to branching out and using the software to support the whole legal department."

"I would recommend Iken Court Bundling without a moment's hesitation, and in fact I do recommend it to anyone who enquires! If you have sufficient budget, buy it; failing that, create a business case justifying the expenditure based on the fact that you will definitely reap the cost savings."

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