



Case Study: Stoke-on-Trent City Council

Quantifiable efficiency gains with Iken Case Management

Serving a thriving urban area with a high population density, Stoke-on-Trent City Council prides itself on actively proving best value to the area's community. To further this, the council is currently undertaking a comprehensive business transformation programme, with the aim of achieving their goal of providing 'Excellent services, valued by customers'.

For the council's Legal Services team the need to demonstrate the value of the service they provide, both to the wider council and to external stakeholders, is of great importance. As Practice Support Manager Andrea Finan explains:

"We have corporate priorities which are set across the whole council, but we also have a set of priorities which are specific to the legal team. Our performance is measured using a very specific set of statistics, such as the cost of legal services per head of the population. The biggest challenge is continuing to meet targets, while dealing with an ongoing increase in workload."

In 2008, the team went out to tender for a Case Management system to support their drive for continuous improvement. They approached the process with a clear set of goals for the new software: to improve efficiency, promote a more professional and uniform approach across the department and provide quality management information. After a detailed evaluation, the team selected Iken Case Management and Time Recording.

"We were particularly impressed with Iken's ease of use – in that respect it was the best we saw. We also quickly established a rapport with the Iken Business staff, and just felt straight away that these were people we could work with."

Here, Andrea explains how Iken has supported the Legal Services team over the past year.

"Iken helps us to implement changing legislation"

One of the legal team's key responsibilities is to ensure that the council's actions are compliant with current law, as well as keeping abreast of constitutional and political changes. Prior to Iken's implementation, ensuring that documentation reflected these ongoing changes presented a considerable challenge.

"Even though we did our best to keep our templates and precedents up to date by printing off blank forms and destroying out-of-date stock, it wasn't a foolproof system – there would always be some old forms squirrelled away in a drawer. With Iken, we have all our templates and precedents in a central electronic location, so we only have to update them once. The correct version is instantly available and there is no confusion."

"Detailed management reporting helps us monitor workload more effectively"

With a large department divided into four separate functions and over forty staff in total, the legal team needed a way to accurately track work levels. Iken comes with a suite of management reports that allow managers to see trends developing, balance workload and identify areas for improvement.



“Over recent years there has been an increasing need for good management information, which was something our old system simply wasn’t able to provide. Iken really helps in providing us with clear evidence about the way we are working, so we can look at methods of increasing efficiency and making the work less labour-intensive. It also ensures that we are aware if workloads are becoming too heavy, so we can reallocate work if necessary.”

“Efficiency gains have helped us exceed target hours by over 30%”

One of the legal department’s key performance indicators is the number of chargeable legal hours that fee-earners complete per annum. With Iken Time Recording, professionals can accurately record the amount of time spent on cases and activities, so that clients can be billed correctly and with the minimum of extra work.

When combined with the time savings afforded by Iken’s automation of routine work, such as the population of documents with frequently used information such as names, addresses and document references, the results for Stoke were impressive.

“We present key statistical information to the Central Services Performance Board on a regular basis. Since we’ve had Iken, each time we’ve reported to the boards, each team has exceeded their target legal hours. Over one three month period, the Property team surpassed their target by more than 30 percent! This is partly attributable to Iken having reduced the amount of administrative work we have to do.”

“We’ve been able to demonstrate the value we offer”

One of the department’s most pressing corporate priorities is the continuing need to deliver value-for-money services. With outsourcing of work inevitably carrying a higher cost to the council, the teams were keen to bring more work back in house.

“We’ve always known that our in-house team operates at a significantly lower cost than work sourced externally, but before Iken we were less able to quantify this. Our Head of Legal Services had a vision of expanding the legal team to encompass education and employment law, which had always been outsourced previously. But this year we were able to approach the boards with detailed information on how we provide best value, and as a result we’ve been given the resource to make this happen!”

“The Iken Business staff are friendly, knowledgeable and supportive”

The past year has been a period of considerable technological change for Stoke’s legal department – as well as implementing Iken, they changed their email system to Outlook. Andrea feels that they have been well supported by the Iken project team. Each client organisation has a dedicated Iken project manager, and Iken helpdesk staff are available to assist with queries via telephone, email and Webex throughout the working week.

“We had a lot going on, but the Iken Business staff were very supportive all along and made us feel confident in the software. Every time we’ve approach the helpdesk they’ve been helpful and efficient, and they are very patient even if we’ve asked a question before! We have a really good relationship.”

Future plans at Stoke-on-Trent

Much as they have achieved in the last twelve months, Andrea and her department are already making plans as to how to further increase efficiency in 2010. They are keen to take advantage of Iken’s library of workflows to help standardise working practices, and also intend to explore how the system can facilitate flexible working.

“As project leader, it was and continues to be important to me that Iken worked well for us,” concludes Andrea. “I have only positive things to say, and not only would I recommend Iken, I have done so on several occasions. It has assisted me in providing the information necessary to maintain the Division’s Lexcel Accreditation, and I’m looking forward to using its capabilities to make even more improvements as time goes on.”

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