

AlphaLAW helps Telford & Wrekin council speed up debt collection



Recovering debts quickly and efficiently is a vital part of any organisation's work, but especially for a local authority, which needs money to provide key public services. So, when Telford & Wrekin Council wanted to upgrade its existing debt recovery system, top among its priorities was a facility to use the Claim Production Centre/County Court Bulk Centre.

The co-located Northampton-based centres have been one of the Government's most notable IT successes in the legal world. Set up by HM Courts Service specifically to deal with straightforward debt collection work, it allows users to automate the transmission of debt cases to the court, both freeing up local courts for other work and providing users with a faster, guaranteed service – claims are usually issued the same day if received by 10am. And it is a cheaper service too, as the discount offered to those using the system means that they can save up to 40% on the standard County Court fee, while its approach to contested cases has led to 50% of defences being resolved informally.

A simple but effective system

Telford & Wrekin in the West Midlands is a fast-growing area of 164,600 people. It became a unitary authority on 1 April 1998, and in 2003

was rated as the first 'Excellent' council in the West Midlands by the Audit Commission. It has retained its 'Excellent' and successor four-star status ever since.



In 2006 Telford & Wrekin Council was the winner of the Municipal Journal's Best Achieving Council Award. The borough has a net revenue budget of £205.6 million and with one of the lowest average band D council tax rates in the Midlands region, keeping a tight control of debt is vital to maintaining the strong financial performance that has been recognised by the Audit Commission, and which has in turn benefited its residents.

The Council did not have any specific problems with the debt recovery system previously in place. But it was time for an upgrade and to

achieve a link-up with the Claim Production Centre, which would revolutionise much of its day-to-day debt work.

Roger Woliter, Interim Head of Legal Services, at the Council explains: “Systems have moved on apace and we needed a user-friendly package. It was important that staff not as familiar with the system would still be able to access the system and navigate it with ease.”

Councils are under more pressure than most to make sure that their budgets are used wisely and so a demanding tender exercise was undertaken.

“The legal staff had a thorough demonstration of the systems and we asked some searching questions,” says Roger. “With AlphaLAW we had the opportunity to visit existing clients and find out how the systems really worked on the ground, not in a conference room.

There is nothing better than seeing someone else using the software in exactly the way you want to. As a result, we were confident that AlphaLAW could deliver what we wanted.”



“The ClaimIT system is very simple to look at and use but also very effective,” says Roger. “Personal responsibility is taken by AlphaLAW staff, and all of the representations about functionality and scope of the system have proven to be correct. We were impressed by the wide range of reports that ClaimIT can generate, driven by our needs and criteria, as well as the choice of report layouts depending on the needs of the internal client.”

“An important element of implementing a new system like this is being able to transfer data without the tedious and time-consuming task of re-entering it. ClaimIT enabled us to import data without any hitches.” adds Roger.

Essential to the transfer from the old system to the new was the training offered by AlphaLAW to Council staff:

“The system is simple to use, but AlphaLAW’s training gave us the confidence to make the switch as seamlessly as possible and has allowed us to get up and running very quickly.”

Benefits realised

Roger Woliter explains that it did not take long for the Council to see the benefits of the new system with its link to the Claim Production Centre:

“We have made savings on court fees, paper and officer time in printing and collating claims, not to mention judgments and enforcements. Through a short series of click buttons, claim forms are ready for sending to the Claims Production Centre within a matter of minutes, a job which previously could have taken more than an hour.” says Roger.

