Staffordshire County Council trebles Deputyship case work & income, and blazes the trail with agile working, thanks to Caspar from Trojan Consultants.

Staffordshire County Council is the top-tier local authority for the non-metropolitan county of Staffordshire, England. In many ways it is a trailblazer among local authorities, and has long championed a commercial approach to running its operations – geared to ensuring services are run efficiently and pay for themselves where possible, while delivering clear value for service users.

Promoting Deputyship best practice

In 2014, the Council moved its Deputyship and Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) teams into Legal Services, to complement its Adult Social Care activities and associated legal help which Staffordshire provides to other local authorities. With one of the largest Deputyship practices in England – featuring four managers and 22 people focused on this work - the Council has a strategic plan to expand its activities by promoting its enviable economies of scale to other councils whose own Appointee and Deputyship teams are overstretched. Staffordshire is able to charge for these services, in line with the Office of the Public Guardian's fee framework, with the result that its Deputyship function is cost-neutral.

"It has been very successful for us," says Steve Broughton, Practice Manager for Legal Services at the Council.

Key to this strategy is Caspar from Trojan Consultants - a purpose-built software system for local authorities managing and reporting on the finances and affairs of vulnerable clients. Staffordshire County Council implemented the software in 2010, to transform the efficiency and rigour of Deputyship case management.

"Before that, teams relied heavily on paperwork and spreadsheets," Steve explains. "There were huge paper folders for each case. It was all very disjointed. As workloads grew, it was becoming harder for staff to keep track of cases, especially if a team member was away on holiday or sick leave. It was unsustainable. With an ageing population and rising cases of Dementia, client case files can have a lifespan of 20 years or more, adding up to a lot of detail to keep track of."

Beating austerity with agile working

At the same time, in common with other councils, Staffordshire has been under pressure to reduce spending. Austerity measures have included rationalising building space. The Council knew that if it could manage its caseloads digitally, this would potentially free up desk space by allowing hot-desking and home-working.

Staffordshire County Council went through a rigorous procurement process to source a suitable system, and found that Caspar stood apart from all other software solutions on the market. "I can

categorically say that Caspar is a unique product: I don't know of any other supplier that provides bespoke software for the Deputyship community," Steve says. "It offered everything the Council needed, and more. It's easy to use, it's very easy to set up and run reports, and we've had no comeback from colleagues which confirms how intuitive the software is."

Now, all records and activities relating to a client case can all be accessed from a single, central place. "It's easy to reconcile client's bank accounts and see all documentation together, which saves time hunting down paperwork," Steve explains.

Better still, team members can work productively from home. "We work very flexibly at Staffordshire County Council," Steve notes. "Each desk is shared between two full-time staff, so there is always someone working away or from home. They can access Caspar remotely via a secure virtual private network (VPN). This, along with our online banking arrangements means staff can be 100 per cent productive from home. We're at the forefront of agile working among UK councils, and we're very proud of this."

Enviable economies of scale

All of these process improvements have enabled the Council to substantially grow its Deputyship throughput. In the five years since Staffordshire moved this work to its Legal Services directorate, caseloads and income have increased threefold. Today it handles some 500 Deputyship cases, plus a further 50 Appointeeship clients, which together constitute around £19 million of capital plus 25 client properties at any one time. Income levels, at £138,000 in 2013/14, have soared to a projected £360,000 for 2019/20. Staffordshire is happy to talk to any local authority if they need help with

deputyship or legal work. They offer the perfect compromise – optimum resources and superior economies of scale, at a more affordable rate than using a private legal team.

More important still is the extra time Staffordshire's Deputyship team gets to spend conversing with clients, Steve notes. "On the one hand, we are running our Deputyship activity as a 'business', but we are also dealing with some very vulnerable and often lonely people so the social element of what we do cannot be underestimated," he says. "Because the Caspar system keeps everything organised and reconciled, and makes light work of official reporting, our team can spend more time nurturing the good relationships they have built up with clients. We have an excellent and highly committed team who work very hard for our clients, and I am immensely proud of them."

Of the importance of Trojan's Caspar software to the work these people do, Steve is in no doubt: "Caspar makes our work more efficient and feeds directly into a better experience for service users," he says.

"It's a reasonably-priced product which our whole team enjoys using. We've also had excellent support from Trojan whose knowledge - not just of their product, but also of the demands of the Deputyship role - is outstanding. We absolutely rely on the many benefits of Caspar to do the job we do, and to extend our services cost-effectively to other local authorities."

Talk to our team to find out more

www.trojanconsultants.com

sales@trojanconsultants.com

@trojansoftware

trojan-consultants-limited