

Local government councils migrate to agile, change-ready Cloud finance management with Unit4



The South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils are moving to a progressive, forward-driving future with Unit4 Cloud. Deployed in six months with support from Unit4 Managed Application Services (MAS), this modern, connected system delivers agile, real-time local government finance management through an intuitive user experience.

- Streamlines and automates financial processes, improving compliance and corporate governance.
- Senior Leaders can realign and reshape services and undertake transformation activities in an agile way.
- Liberates resources to focus on strategic local government services delivery.
- Ensures change at cloud speed.
- Seamless interoperability.

Bold, imaginative strategy to re-imagine finance

South Oxfordshire District Council works with Vale of White Horse District Council to provide cost-effective services to approximately 294,000 residents in the southeast of England.

The two Councils also share a progressive strategy to re-imagine finance. Local authorities are under intense pressure to deliver high quality public services with shrinking resources. Several Councils in England have already issued Section 114 notices, effectively an admission that they do not have the resources to meet current expenditure. Against this

backdrop, prudent financial management has never been more important.

“Our Councils are continually looking at innovative new ways to manage budgets more effectively, drive change, and deliver better public services,” says Ben Watson, the Councils’ Exchequer and Procurement Manager. “We want to transform finance operations — liberating resources to focus on more of what matters most: helping our citizens and local communities thrive.”

South Oxfordshire Council has used Unit4’s financial management and accounting platform for many years to underpin financial accounting, procurement, billing, and asset management. Several events, including a devastating fire that destroyed a data center and the adoption of a cloud-first application strategy, led the Council to re-evaluate its Unit4 deployment.

Challenges

- Reduce finance complexity and duplication.
- Accelerate informed financial decision making.
- Keep pace with local government change.



Key metrics

6 Months

QUICK DEPLOYMENT
Cloud model, standardization, and Unit4 MAS expertise drive fast implementation



AGILITY

Services can be transformed without being hindered by the previous slow and cumbersome process



Industry

Local Government

Location

Abingdon, UK

Size

Approx. 500 staff, 294,000 residents

Product

Unit4 Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP)

“The Unit4 MAS team performed an exceptional role, all the way from discovery through to design, implementation, testing, and training.”

Ben Watson

Exchequer and Procurement Manager, South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Councils

Cloud reduces risk and ensures rapid time to value

“Unit4 Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) Cloud was the perfect fit for the two Councils’ shared services model,” Ben explains. “It eliminates the cost, complexity, and maintenance associated with an on-premises platform. It adapts quickly and easily to whatever change is around the corner, and enables the Councils to innovate new features, such as finance automation and agile service integration. Moreover, we could procure the platform easily through the Government’s G-Cloud Framework.”

Any fears that the cloud deployment would be slow, difficult, and disruptive soon disappeared. Ben again: “We lacked the in-house resources and technical expertise to implement Unit4 ERP Cloud ourselves. However, Unit4 MAS provided us with collaborative support, public sector implementation expertise, and experience from scores of previous cloud projects to reduce risk and ensure a rapid time-to-value.”

Among many services, the MAS team reduced workloads via automatic data updating across systems aligned with GDS governance principles and helped the Councils establish an in-house Exchequer service.

The implementation went live in only six months. “The upgrade from on-premises to Unit4 ERP Cloud was incredibly fast for such a critical and complex local government finance service. One of the secrets to that success was to standardize the financial processes, using the proven pre-built features as opposed to customising them to fit our operating model. The Unit4 MAS team performed an exceptional

role, all the way from discovery through to design, implementation, testing, and training,” says Ben.

Single version of the truth drives agile change

The Councils benefit from a single, adaptive finance and procurement model, which adapts quickly to change and delivers timely, accurate finance information for decision making. “We can now extract the signal from the noise,” Ben says.

Benefits include:

- **Smarter accounting:** Streamlines and automates financial processes, from accounting and procurement to reporting and analysis, to achieve better compliance and corporate governance. A single view of data eliminates time lags, sub-ledgers, data fragmentation, and reconciling different modules.
- **Increased agility:** Timely, shared view of data accelerates decision making. Budgets can be transferred quickly between service teams and budget holders, without compromising the checks and balances necessary when spending public money.
- **Improved productivity:** With many everyday finance processes now automated, and platform support provided by MAS, Council staff can concentrate on strategic tasks that support local government services delivery. The Unit4 Workspace, for example, allows users to setup a reporting dashboard that provides easy to use drill-down reports and KPIs at a glance.
- **Timely, accurate shared data:** Cloud platform is continually on the latest release and delivers API interoperability with other Council systems, including income management and bank payment services for seamless operations.
- **Intuitive user experience:** According to Ben, “Some of the people using the system are not finance professionals. By giving them an easy, graphical view of the data, they are more comfortable using the system. It’s difficult to make mistakes with Unit4.”
- **Increased security:** Security is simpler and more robust, being aligned with SSO and Microsoft Office365 — also stronger at scale.
- **Supportive of environmental goals:** The Cloud platform delivers on carbon neutral ESG strategy — potentially moving to cloud negative.
- **Hybrid working:** Staff can log onto the cloud platform anytime, anywhere. A mobile, flexible working model fits the Councils’ future workplace strategy and delivers a more satisfying employee experience.
- **Shared services model:** South Oxfordshire and The Vale of White Horse District Council share a single ERP platform, with data securely segregated between the two. Shared instance reduces total cost of operation.

“Unit4 is progressing both Councils to a forward-driving future. Our finance teams are empowered by unified finance, real-time insights, and an exceptional user experience,” Ben concludes.