



UNIT4 Agresso Case Study

New Forest District Council adapts to sector change with UNIT4's Agresso Local Government ERP Platform

The situation

Geographically New Forest District Council (NFDC) is one of the largest District Councils in the UK with 80,000 homes and over 200,000 people in its catchment area. Employing 1,400 staff the Council still maintains its own housing stock of about 5,000 properties and operates five Health and Leisure centres. The region also incorporates a national park authority.

In common with local councils across the UK it continues to face the challenge of an entirely new landscape where public services must be delivered despite huge cuts in funding. Adding to the complexity are its diverse and heavily regulated operations spread across multiple sites.

In order to adapt it needed fast, accurate reporting and greater efficiency; key to this was a joined-up approach to finance, procurement, human resources (HR), payroll and project costing.

Back in 2000 this would have been impossible because the Council used multiple, generally unconnected systems to manage operations. This was expensive to maintain and difficult to change; what's more, Councillors, Executives and budget-holders could not be sure of the accuracy of the reported data. All-in-all the situation compromised the Council's ability to adapt to the dynamic environment in which it was required to operate.

The need

"Back then there were multiple problems that meant the Council was not as efficient as it could be," said Ken Connolly, Head of ICT Services at NFDC. "Often processes were completely over-engineered which led to the extra cost of dedicating resources to maintain and change unnecessarily elongated business processes or operate manual systems."

Data held in the HR, payroll and general ledger systems didn't tally, and there was a limited capacity to collate and manage absence related data. Project-based teams often struggled to understand finances. Officers with budget responsibility resorted to spreadsheets to record and manipulate financial data.

"In significant areas of the Council a lack of joined up financial systems from a variety of suppliers meant we were impeded in our aspiration for timely and accurate financial information," said Ken Connolly, Head of ICT Services at NFDC. "With this lack of simple visibility it was almost impossible for council leaders to adapt to the challenges we would be facing."

The organisation began to look for an enterprise technology platform capable of providing a single version of truth across its operations. NFDC's key objectives were increased speed and accuracy of reporting, agility in coping with change, systems integration and rationalisation. After a thorough tender process NFDC's financial systems project team selected the Agresso Local Government ERP Platform.

"We chose the system based on its flexibility and depth. UNIT4 also presented with sincerity and product knowledge," continued Connolly. "We could see that we would be able to make changes to the system, when we needed to, without having to contract expensive external consultants."

"NFDC initially implemented Agresso Financials, Projects and Purchase Order Processing, HR, Recruitment, Payroll and Training administration. Most recently we have added Accounts Receivable (Income Manager) to the portfolio. Throughout the implementation the UNIT4 team provided

advice and guidance to NFDC's internal team on the use of the Agresso software. This meant that the knowledge to configure and maintain the platform was passed to NFDC so it had the skills to manage and configure the system on an on-going basis once 'go live' was achieved."

The benefits

"The UK Government's Comprehensive Spending Review in 2010 introduced a raft of funding cuts including an annual fall in budgets of 7.2 percent. Without the flexibility and tight integration of Agresso Local Government ERP Platform, and the visibility and control it provided, we would have really struggled to maintain services with reduced budgets." said Connolly.

NFDC now has in place a fully integrated technology Platform that provides visibility of the whole organisation at one glance with which decisions can be made based on using a single version of truth. It is able to meet requests for high quality management information from department heads and managers which is used to reduce costs and drive up efficiencies e.g. in managing down sickness absences year-on-year.

"From the day the Platform was switched on the most memorable difference in the way we operated was that we had the tools to clearly understand our business and budget situation and then adapt rapidly," continued Connolly. "This has underpinned the Council's ability to align its strategy to the unprecedented sector change with minimum disruption."

"The management of people is subject to continual changes in legislation," said Connolly. "In that respect the rationalisation of legacy systems and integration of HR, payroll and the general ledger underpins considerable organisational flexibility. We can make changes once, rather than multiple times with little or no disruption to the business. It has also driven considerable labour and ICT cost savings and improved the speed and integrity of our Payroll."

There are improvements across the organisation, Agresso Project Costing and Billing is enabling the authority's Building Management department to make savings. Automation, including electronic procurement, has also provided a cost saving and the creation of a 'local' marketplace for Hampshire-based public sector organisations has helped to lower the cost of purchase and led to cost-saving collaborative contracts.

"By rationalising our systems on to a single integrated Platform," said Connolly. "We have achieved our main objectives to meet efficiency challenges, increase the speed and accuracy of reporting and improve the Council's ability to cope with change. With the support of UNIT4 and hard work of our internal teams the project has been a great success."

About UNIT4

UNIT4 is a global business software and services company that creates, provides and supports software for Businesses Living IN Change – delivered via the cloud or on-premise – to help these fast-changing organisations manage their business needs effectively. We strive to set the global standard for business solutions that help our customers to embrace change independently, in the most simple, quick and cost-effective way.

We have a broad portfolio of solutions that address different markets, requirements, technologies and types of organisation. The UNIT4 group incorporates a number of the world's leading change-embracing software brands, including: UNIT4 Agresso, our flagship ERP suite for mid-sized services-intensive organisations; UNIT4 Coda Financials, our best-of-class financial management software; and FinancialForce.com, the cloud applications company formed with investment from salesforce.com. UNIT4 has operations in 26 countries across Europe, North America, Asia Pacific and Africa (as well as sales activities in several other countries) for easy, local access to service and support.

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