

Coventry City Council

UNIT4 Agresso ERP Local Government Platform underpins a transformation programme that has saved over £3M to date.

The situation

Coventry City Council provides a wide range of services to over 320,000 citizens, aiming to improve the city as a place to live, work and play. In the wake of the 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review and the subsequent funding cuts to the sector that will last for the foreseeable future, council leaders began an organisational transformation programme - 'ABC' (A Better Council for a bolder Coventry). ABC (which would be succeeded by the 'Kick-Start' programme) would review everything the council did to improve efficiency and services provided to taxpayers.

As part of ABC, Coventry's finance department launched 'Money Matters', a programme which would analyse all end-to-end finance processes to identify areas of improvement both in the department and for senior managers and budget holders across the council.

Because of the way it had been configured, it quickly became apparent that the council's existing Oracle finance system would not have the flexibility to accommodate the improvements recommended by the Money Matters team without significant investment in external expertise or re-implementation.

The need

To enable transformation, there was a recognised need for a more flexible, lower cost solution with up-to-date and improved functionality.

With the thrust of the wider transformation centered upon business change, the view was that Coventry City Council required a new finance solution capable of adapting quickly and painlessly to reorganisations. It was reasoned that if the

existing Oracle system remained it would impact the business with slow reaction times, high costs and widespread business disruption.

"We needed a new finance system," said Barry Hastie, Assistant Director: Financial Management, Revenues and Benefits at Coventry City Council. "The incumbent was heavily customised and as a result so inflexible we couldn't even upgrade it, let alone align it to the new ways of working suggested by Money Matters."

The council had other reasons to act, the current system was a burnt platform and fall down was an increasing risk, this would have been unacceptable. For a Local Authority to not have a fully functioning finance system would be catastrophic, due to the impact of collation of financial statements, and the impact on customers and suppliers.

The solution

UNIT4 Agresso supports positive change and drives efficiency at lower cost.

"We chose the UNIT4 Local Government ERP platform to replace Oracle because it had the best fit for our procurement criteria," said Joe Sansom, Transformation Programme Delivery Manager at Coventry City Council. "Crucially its configurable architecture would provide the flexibility we needed to adapt to change now and in the future. Although the initial implementation would focus on finance and procurement, with the wider ABC programme in mind the broad functionality offered by the Agresso Local Government ERP platform, across areas like human resources and payroll, were also of interest to us."

The council implemented UNIT4 Agresso using the Local Government template, a methodology that delivers standard local government processes out-of-the-box. This helped the council implement finance and procurement for 2500 users on time and under budget.

Benefits

UNIT4 facilitates transformation and ongoing improvements that deliver value to the taxpayer. Interfacing into 24 other systems, Agresso is central to change at the council. Senior managers, budget holders and project managers are now empowered with a range of tools to drive through the efficiencies required by ABC and Money Matters.

- As part of the wider Money Matters programme Agresso has facilitated and underpinned **£3.075M in savings to-date**.
- There is a culture of greater awareness and consistency for finances. With **real-time visibility** decision makers can make change happen, collaborating with others as-and-when required. Also, despite a radically new way of working, workflow that supports good sector practice means that employees observe **more consistent and robust finance practices**.
- There is **no dependency on UNIT4**. The council has been live for six months and despite tremendous change during that time it has not had to spend a single penny on consulting - any configurations are managed in-house. This is a big departure from Oracle, which required around £120,000 a year on consultancy costs just to keep it up and running.
- **Change is no longer feared**. "Speaking to a corporate manager in the finance team they mentioned the desire to move end of year reporting from June in 2014 to May in 2015," said Sansom. "With the old system we know that would have provoked organisation-wide anxiety, now however we feel confident we can manage the change ourselves in house."

"Six months in we would have expected a downturn in sentiment towards any new system that requires such a radically different way of working," said Sansom. "However, we found the opposite. Sentiment actually improved in most areas including information accessibility, forecasting, clarity and format and we expect this to get even better as the system beds down."

59 employees in the Financial Management Division responded to a formal and extensive post implementation

survey. They were asked to score on a scale of 0 to 5 the extent to which they agreed to the statements below.

- The Implementation of Agresso has improved the quality of financial information and will lead to better decision making.
- It is easier and quicker for me to obtain the data that I need through Agresso.
- Data in Agresso is easier to understand and analyse.
- Reports are easier to run in Agresso and the reporting outputs are clearer and more useful.
- The new chart of accounts is simpler and improves both financial and management accounting.

Despite the significant changes to coding structures and data, the survey showed a significant overall improved rating against each of these categories, as shown in Figure 1 below:



Figure 1 – Quality of Financial Information

For the future, Coventry City Council is looking to deliver even better value for money to its taxpayers by investing in Agresso Human Resources and Payroll.

"We entered a crucial transformation programme with a heavily customised incumbent system that would have hampered progress," concluded Sansom. "We are ending it with a solution that is fit for purpose, fit for the sector landscape, and that actually supports business change."

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.

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