

Forward-thinking finance empowers modern local government



Cherwell District Council



The Unit4 implementation at Cherwell District Council (CDC) has dramatically raised the bar for future transformation projects in local government. Implemented entirely remotely by Embridge Consulting, on time and on budget during lockdown, the finance system is driving dramatic improvements in efficiency, agility, and faster, more informed decision-making.

- Reduces bank reconciliation process from up to 18 days each month to same-day process.
- Decreases time spent on certain processes from 32 to 18 days per month.
- Over-arching digital transformation strategy reduces Council’s running costs by approximately 33% over five years.
- Delivered remotely on time and on budget, inspired by Embridge expertise, collaboration, and EVA methodology.

Ground-breaking approach to municipal services

Cherwell District Council is part of a three-tier local authority structure, supporting the citizens of businesses in North Oxfordshire, UK. The Council’s 600 employees serve 150,000 residents.

CDC is forward-thinking, with a ground-breaking approach to municipal services like housing and regeneration. This innovation also extends to digital transformation, through rigorous focus on digital, citizen-centric service.

The ambitious Finance Systems Solution is a central focus of this transformation. The existing finance system relied on data tied to separate, disconnected silos. This, in turn, resulted in a drain on time and resources, with insufficient information and significant manual intervention. For example, budget management and reporting relied on complex spreadsheets and large print volumes. Likewise, year-end closure and production of statutory accounts were labor intensive and slow.

Industry
Local Government

Location
Banbury, UK

Size
Cherwell district population: 150,000


Product
Unit4 Enterprise Resource Planning

Challenges

Cherwell Council was relying on disparate, fragmented finance systems and processes resulting in different versions of the truth, delayed decision-making, and reduced efficiency.

Key metrics

33%
EFFICIENCY
Increase in operational efficiency over 5 years


SPEED
Reduced bank reconciliation to same-day process

“What is remarkable about this project is how people worked as one to implement an entire finance system virtually. The success was down to careful project initiation, building remote relationships, and rigorous testing.”

Claire Taylor

Corporate Director for Customers, Organisational Development and Resources, Cherwell District Council

Once the finance transformation strategy was approved, a Unit4 Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) platform was selected to underpin the new operating model. Claire Taylor, Corporate Director for Customers, Organisational Development and Resources, explains. “Unit4 understands the complexity of local government – the platform is tailored around our needs. It also connects easily with other systems, is intuitive to use, and offers unmatched financial management integrity.”

Remote implementation

CDC and Unit4 worked with Embridge Consulting to deliver deployment. A challenge which no one could foresee was the impact of Covid-19. Claire again: “What is remarkable about this project is how people worked as one to implement an entire finance system virtually. The success was down to careful project initiation, building remote relationships, and rigorous testing.”

The unified solution provides budget stakeholders, the finance team, and other Council staff with a complete, timely view into the finance situation, presented in a user-friendly, graphical format. The team has near real-time visibility and control over every stage of the record-to-report cycle – from any device, anytime. They also have the flexibility to streamline budget planning and analysis while consolidating data into one shared system.

This has resulted in an innovative workspace and created a leading-

edge module. As a result, the Council has improved, more agile decision-making capability and a system that provides a sense of ownership and ready to shape the authority’s future. The finance team is now able to focus on value-add activities.

Despite the obstacles posed by the pandemic – and in partnership with Embridge Consulting – the project was delivered on time and on budget. “At every stage of the project, the finance requirements and budget were placed front and center. The Council also invested in a dedicated project team and assigned key decision-makers to the project board,” says Leanne Lock, Strategic Business Partner.

Emma O’Brien, CEO of Embridge, says, “The advantage to a local authority in choosing Embridge is our size. Unlike the large, multinational SIs, we can be much more agile, respond to situations very quickly, and work as a tight-knit collaborative team.”

The Embridge Value Accelerator (EVA) deployment model was vital to the timely, on budget program delivery. Emma explains, “Our EVA methodology is a pre-built ERP implementation strategy and configuration, created with industry-specific best practice and including statutory compliance. EVA significantly reduced the time and effort involved in the Unit4 transformation program.”

COVID-19 also required a focus on team wellbeing during the program. For example, remote quizzes and social events were introduced to keep up the team’s resilience, while

timescales were adjusted to mitigate the impact of “screen fatigue.”

Forward-thinking finance transformation

This forward-thinking finance transformation reimagines finance management at the Council:

- Reduced time needed for bank reconciliation from up to 18 days each month to same-day process. Process automation has reduced time spent on certain processes from 32 to 18 days per month.
- Budget managers have the information at their fingertips to make fast, informed decisions.
- Over-arching digital transformation strategy will reduce running costs by about 33% over five years.
- One common view of finance data enables trusted collaboration, smarter working, and better outcomes.
- On-time, on-budget implementation was achieved, despite virtual, remote deployment.
- Significant reduction of volume of printed paper helps meet CO2 goals and other environmental credentials.

Claire concludes, “At all stages, the project has exemplified creativity, collaboration, and care for the people involved, all the while navigating new ways of working. However, the team never lost sight of their focus: to deliver a business-wide finance system which meets the Council’s fast-changing needs.”