



Lead Authority Shared Services:

West Northamptonshire Council, in partnership with Cambridgeshire County Council, Milton Keynes Council & North Northamptonshire Council.

Uniting over 14,000 users across the region on a flagship Unit4 Business World system with superfast cloud hosting, limitless system scaling, and an unperturbed, confident attitude.

About the Project

The lead authority arrangement shares services across West and North Northamptonshire Councils, Cambridgeshire County Council, Milton Keynes Council, and a number of other public sector partner organisations, using a tailored Unit4 Business World system: ERP Gold. The complex ERP Gold solution handles all HR, payroll, and finance business process functionalities for eleven operational clients.

Three unitary councils, one county council, two pension funds, one fire and rescue authority, three independent organisations, and one payroll bureau handling the payroll for hundreds of schools all use the shared Unit4 ERP system. The extensive (and ever-expanding) client list, as well as the 27,000 people paid by the system each month, demands a highly available, scalable, and optimised Unit4 system.



The Journey with QuickThink Cloud

Beginning in 2020, QuickThink Cloud have been working with the shared service for cloud hosting and other consultancy services. The relationship has grown considerably, with QuickThink Cloud working together with the shared service's internal teams to enable system growth and explore technical possibilities.

In just the first year, QuickThink Cloud have collaborated with the shared service to migrate ERP Gold to cloud hosting, perform a milestone upgrade, and scale the system for the onboarding of two large unitary councils. Throughout, QuickThink Cloud have offered expert consultancy and advice, becoming like in-house team members, cooperating with the authority for the ultimate optimised system.

QuickThink Cloud Services

The authority can call on QuickThink Cloud to offer expert advice and a flexible approach to any number of technical issues or possibilities.

- + Cloud Hosting
- + Cloud Migration
- + Milestone Upgrade
- + Implementation
- + Technical Managed Service
- + Consulting

Cloud Migration

Prior to 2018, there were multiple ERP systems across the partner councils, replaced by the single comprehensive Unit4 Business World solution, ERP Gold. Originally implemented in house and hosted on data centres at onsite premises, the ERP Gold system underwent changes in 2020 to allow for increased scalability and reduced reliance on local hardware.

Following the procurement process, QuickThink Cloud were chosen to partner with the shared service for cloud hosting. The ERP Gold system was due a milestone upgrade too, but the shared service was hesitant to change the system hardware and software at the same time, risking business continuity. However, QuickThink Cloud were up to the challenge, and even produced a 'proof of concept' to reassure them.

In November 2020, the shared service's ERP Gold solution was moved to cloud hosting and updated, without downtime. Despite the significant infrastructure and software changes, the experience was seamless for the many thousands of users.



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Unitary Council Implementations

In April 2021, Northamptonshire County Council and seven other district and borough councils were combined to form two new unitary councils: West Northamptonshire Council and North Northamptonshire Council. As part of the lead authority shared service arrangements, the support services to these two new unitary councils would be managed on the ERP Gold solution.

To facilitate the introduction of the two unitary councils, QuickThink Cloud ensured the smooth-running of the Unit4 system, aiding with system scaling, technical onboarding, and cloud hosting concerns. The project involved migrating the financial, HR and payroll services of eight former councils onto the already complex Unit4 Business World solution; one of the biggest implementations both parties had encountered.

With such a large overhaul of council services, the shared service was nervous about any possible downtime. The QuickThink Cloud team were able to put the authorities at ease, giving them peace of mind that their system would be available 24/7 throughout the change. The huge scaling required did not threaten the cloud hosted system; QuickThink Cloud attentively oversaw the careful and considered expansion with a flexible, confident approach.

Another concern for the shared service in regard to the migration of seven separate district and borough council systems onto the one shared ERP Gold solution was the technical access for each of the councils. For each new council and corresponding network, an access model had to be created that worked seamlessly. QuickThink Cloud were able to advise on the technical design model and help the authorities achieve effective access methods.

Outcomes

Complimentary Relationship

The authority's internal teams work cohesively with QuickThink Cloud to better their system, benefitting from a two-way transfer of knowledge and open, informed discussions. If and when problems occur, both parties discuss openly and understand the issue to gain knowledge, informing future troubleshooting instances and improving the customer experience.

Confident, Flexible Approach

The combination of QuickThink Cloud's extensive experience and the shared service's highly-skilled internal teams results in the assured confidence in their Unit4 solution and future capabilities, especially regarding system flexibility for scalability. Having undertaken large, complex projects together, the shared service has full confidence in the QuickThink Cloud team to help them achieve what was previously challenging.

Cloud Hosting Expertise

QuickThink Cloud offer an advanced level of cloud hosting expertise, offering specialist advice on the technical aspect. While the shared service's internal teams focus on system configuration and development, QuickThink Cloud advise on infrastructure, scaling capabilities and cloud hosting resources.

"During a period of huge change, QTC enabled us to respond to every challenge without fail. For every issue, there was a well-considered solution and pleasingly, despite the increased agility afforded to us by the scalable cloud architecture, the answer was not always throw more capacity at it. In fact, quite often the answer was collaboration to agree innovative use of existing solutions – saving us money, as well as time."

Lewis Smith

Business Systems Service and Support Manager

