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West Berkshire Council more efficient with G7 Unit4 ERP support

G7 Business Solutions is helping West Berkshire Council improve efficiency through its ongoing support and development work for the local authority's Unit4 ERP system (formerly Unit4 Business World and Agresso) as it upgrades to Milestone 7.

G7's role at West Berkshire is twofold. It maintains a fully operational Unit4 system through its Application Managed Service (AMS) and alongside provides expertise on how best to develop the system to maximise efficiency gains and cost savings for the council.

The council sourced external help in 2018 to assist its IT team to continue supporting what was an ageing version of the system and to design and implement a major upgrade alongside of this.

West Berkshire Council's Systems Integration Officer, Phil Cridge, said: "G7 stood out in the tender process because their consultants know Unit4 systems inside out. They were also very responsive and the flexibility of their AMS offers the best value for money."

Under the contract, West Berkshire Council's IT team has access to a bank of expert AMS consultants for a set number of prepaid hours per month. They can scale that up or down as required depending on workload.

"We now log every ticket with G7's AMS team, which is the best testament ever to the quality of their work," said Cridge.

With local authorities under very close scrutiny and tight budget constraints, visibility and value for money is crucial. G7 submits a weekly report on all the AMS calls and activity it's carried out for West Berkshire Council so the IT team can monitor usage and issues, either with the system or with users' understanding of it.

G7's consultancy role is equally as critical as the AMS work. In 2019 G7 carried out a full review of the council's existing system set up, including running workshops examining in detail the objectives of the upgrade to Milestone 7. They then produced recommendations on how best to configure the new system to achieve those aims and take advantage of the new technology's features, both in the initial phase and going forward.

"Every organisation has a wish list of functionality they'd like to introduce but never have the time to do it," Cridge observed, "but with G7's expertise and resource we are starting to make longstanding ambitions a reality."

As a result of the review G7 has carried out a range of projects. Alongside designing, structuring and implementing the upgrade to Milestone 7, they've handled business improvement work including an assessment of fixed assets and setting up direct debits for all areas from social care to garden waste.

In addition, G7 has been integral to the council's move to implement the Income Manager module of Unit4 ERP and will continue that for payments in phase two.

Replacing paper documents with electronic communications is another area. For finance, AR and AP, email has become the default for issuing remittance advices. Next, G7 will develop this for other elements such as invoicing. Going paperless is one example of where the council is making cost savings. It's also been a benefit in terms of dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic by allowing more finance staff to work from home rather than have to be in the office to process paperwork.

The coronavirus has placed new pressures on West Berkshire Council's IT team so G7 has stepped in to take over some 'business as usual' activity. This is giving the internal staff the flexibility and capacity to react to the changing demands of the organisation.

"G7 basically takes the burden off my shoulders," acknowledged Cridge. "Their team is an extension of our internal resource and it's like working with colleagues."

He believes there will always be a role for external technical support. "With any system, you have to move forward all the time," he said. "G7's knowledge and experience are invaluable in understanding the capabilities of Unit4 ERP, identifying the opportunities for us as a council and then configuring the best solution."

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