

OPEN

BRIEFING REPORT

Audit and Governance Committee

31 March 2025

Unit4 Briefing

Report of: Adele Taylor, Interim Executive Director of Resources and S151 Officer

Report Reference No: AG/29/24-25

Wards affected: N/A

Purpose of Report

- 1 To provide Audit and Governance committee with an update on a range of activities designed to enhance the usability, efficiency, and perception of Unit 4 in Cheshire East Council (CEC) through various initiatives, including governance changes, functionality improvements, performance enhancements, and process reengineering.

Executive Summary

- 2 The programme of work is being delivered through essential ongoing service improvement and delivery within CEC and the Transactional Shared Service (TSS)-led Stabilisation and Improvement programme jointly funded with Cheshire West and Chester and being supported by Human Engine, an external company supporting the transformation work. Key activities include stakeholder engagement, health check workshops, and a review of the Agilisys contract to support the implementation of a new integration solution.

Background

- 3 Following the verbal update given to committee on 30th September 2024 this briefing note aims to update members on progress.

- 4 Key deliverables in the last year include the health check analysis, service delivery optimisation, integration replacement proof of concept, and contract management activities which have informed the next stages of the improvement programme. Upcoming deliverables focus on the Transactional Shared Service delivery model review, modern integration implementation, and ongoing optimisation.

Briefing Information

- 5 The programme focuses on improving functionality, performance, capability, processes, reporting and communication within Unit 4 in CEC.
- 6 A communication strategy is being drafted to ensure all stakeholders across the council are kept informed of progress on each of the improvement items.
- 7 Stakeholders and users have been engaged through Unit4 (the company) and Human Engine workshops, and feedback sessions to document what works well and what needs improvement.
- 8 The health check workshops and discovery sessions with Unit4 have laid the foundation for a comprehensive programme addressing statutory compliance and functionality gaps.
 - (a) The health check was completed in August 2024, with a verbal update given to Audit and Governance committee in September 2024.
 - (b) The recommendations from the health check and roadmap for improvement is to be implemented from January 2025 through to March 2026 for the highest priority areas.
 - (c) Initial phase for highest priority areas of statutory compliance to be delivered by April 2025. Progress has been good in resolving high priority issues.
- 9 A Transactional Shared Service delivery review is being undertaken by our delivery partner, Human Engine. This review will document current ways of working, provide feedback sessions to key stakeholders, and recommend a number of options for future improvements. The procurement of delivery partner completed in December 2024. Output from the Service delivery review with recommendations will be delivered in April 2025.
- 10 Two non-user-facing workstreams include a Proof of Concept (PoC) project to replace an existing legacy integration solution with a modern Microsoft Azure technology. PoC was completed in December 2024.

Implementation is planned to run from February 2025 through to March 2026. In relation to the review of the Agilisys contract, work will be undertaken to link into the future support model review decision to understand requirements for replacement the current support contract with an alternative supplier. The current Agilisys contract expires September 2026.

- 11 Ongoing initiatives include user support and education through manager support sessions, targeting problem areas costing both councils money and improving user experience of Unit4.
- 12 Efforts have been made to provide enhanced Unit4 access to support council super-users, enabling self-sufficiency for finance-related activities.
- 13 Ongoing service reviews continue between HR/Finance clients and TSS.
- 14 A number of changes have formed part of service improvement activities in the Governance and Support team, these include:
 - (a) Improved Support Site materials and user guides
 - (b) Re-introduced end user Knowledge Transfer Sessions.
 - (c) Developed and mobilised HR forms to improve end user experience and reduce manual input.
 - (d) Implemented several new interfaces across a number of systems (inc. Early Years, Purchase cards and Oxygen).
 - (e) Implemented new pay schemes (inc. Home and Electronics, Salary Sacrifice)
 - (f) Improved UNIT4 access for single sign-on for all users
 - (g) Delivered the National Fraud Initiative submission and improved process
 - (h) Developed a series of Power BI Dashboards to strengthen the use of data in decision making and inform demand reduction.
 - (i) Improved KPIs across all Governance and Support functions
 - (j) Supported a number of team members to undertake Data Apprenticeship qualifications to develop knowledge, skills capacity the service
- 15 Service improvements in Payments and Income include:

- (a) Successful tests, upgrades, and implementations have been carried out in the banking and financial management systems.
 - (b) Successful system upgrades The Access PaySuite Cash Management System was upgraded to V14, and the transition of locally hosted to Cloud was successfully tested and implemented into the live environment. Additionally, new business objects reports were tested following the Cash Receipting system upgrade to the cloud.
 - (c) Process and procedure changes have been made, including new processes for CEC Banks, reduction of items in suspense, and new payment processes for CEC and CWaC Garden Waste.
 - (d) A number of cost reduction and efficiency initiatives were launched, such as reduction in printing and postage costs, demand management reduction initiatives, and the transition to electronic payment methods.
- 16 Recruitment and Pay service improvements include reviewing access channels, launching an enquiry form, developing a case viewer, creating Power BI dashboards, reintroducing knowledge transfer sessions, streamlining contract processes, undertaking reconciliations, developing standard operating procedures, establishing monthly liaison meetings, reviewing leavers processes, and conducting end-to-end business process reviews.

Implications

Monitoring Officer/Legal

- 17 Whilst there are no legal implications flowing directly from the content of this report, there could be legal, reputational and resource implications included as part of the outcomes of various reviews. Consideration will be given to these outcomes when they are available.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

- 18 The current known requirements for revenue and capital spending, regarding matters covered by this report, have been reflected in the budgets approved by Council in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2025/26-29. Any further changes will be reported for consideration in the future, as the related projects progress.
- 19 Whilst it is too early to estimate financial effects, it is hoped that reviews in respect of the internal and external support models – and associated procurements – will offer the potential for financial savings in the medium term.

Policy

20 There are no direct policy implications.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

21 There are no equality implications arising from this report.

Human Resources

22 HR implications for staff will depend on the outcomes of various reviews. Consideration will be given to these outcomes when they are available.

Risk Management

23 Failure to improve the current provision of Unit4 and the TSS service delivery model will significantly impact CECs ability to deliver process efficiencies, improved data reporting and user experience.

Rural Communities

24 There are no direct implications for rural communities.

Children and Young People including Cared for Children, care leavers and Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

25 There are no direct implications for Children and Young People including Cared for Children, care leavers and Children with special educational needs and disabilities.

Public Health

26 There are no direct implications for public health.

Climate Change

27 There are no direct implications for climate change.

Access to Information	
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Appendices:	None
Background Papers:	None