

# Adaptive finance for a dynamic housing association



## Accent



**As this housing association evolves, building and managing more homes, Unit4 adapts with it. A flexible, integrated Unit4 finance and payroll Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system is supporting agile change, improving resource optimization, and empowering people to do more.**

Intelligent process automation, faster time to insights, and ease of use are freeing finance teams to concentrate on housing strategy instead of repetitive everyday processes.

Key benefits include:

- Month-end accruals completed within three days of end of month, versus 10 days before Unit4 ERP
- Year-end finance system reporting completed within 10 days
- Financial statements signed off one month faster than before Unit4 ERP
- Integrated payroll
- Automated expenses improve employee engagement and experience
- Electronic pay slips and P60s
- Task app enables users to approve requisitions, orders, invoices, and expenses “on the move”

### Unit4 at home

Accent is a housing association which has provided housing since 1966. The organization has more than 20,000 properties throughout the North, East, and South of the UK, which are home to more than 35,000 people.

This ambitious organization is growing fast, with a goal to build up to 500 new homes a year and ensure the homes it already owns are fit for modern family living. However, this growth is not without its challenges. Prior to implementing Unit4, Accent’s finance function relied on multiple, manual, overlapping processes. The ordering system, for example, was separate from the core finance platform, there were many point integrations, and spreadsheet-based reporting was rife.

“Accent has a complex financial model, involving both the development of new homes, managing tenancy relationships, home repairs – and, of course,

#### Industry

Professional Services —  
Housing Association

#### Location

Registered office: Shipley, UK

#### Size

20,000+ homes across England,  
more than 35,000 residents

#### Product

Unit4 Enterprise Resource  
Planning (ERP)

### Challenges

**Create an adaptive finance and payroll system that flexes to changing business needs. Move people from manual, repetitive tasks to focus on creating and maintaining housing.**

### Key metrics

**A Few  
Minutes...**

Time to complete  
expenses, versus  
a few hours  
before

**3 days**

Processing  
month-end  
accruals,  
compared to  
10 days before

**“There’s no messing about with Unit4. It’s quick, adaptive, and easy. It’s also designed with the user in mind. People can be productive almost immediately.”**

**Nicola Haigh**

Finance Systems Administrator, Accent

supporting our 420 staff,” says Cath Holmes, Systems Accountant. “Our vision was to cut through this complexity, introducing a single, unified, best-practice finance platform geared to flexible and agile financial management.”

The housing association turned to Unit4 in 2009 as part of a complete, integrated Unit4 Financial Management ERP implementation. Accent has deployed the core finance module alongside Procurement, Payroll, Fixed Assets, and Planner to take control of finance, increasing visibility, reducing manual effort, and driving agility.

Using Procurement, for example, budget holders can execute non-housing purchases, such as development costs and office overheads, in a self-service environment, without intervention from the finance function. Users simply decide on the purchase, raise a purchase order (PO) in the intuitive Unit4 system, and the goods are receipted.

“We now have complete control over our purchase-to-pay process,” says Cath. “Our teams can authorize and process everything with the click of a button. Everyone shares the same common view of the data, it’s easy to use, and every step in the buying process is visible. Best of all, the automation eliminates a huge number of manual data entry and processing tasks, freeing up time for other tasks.”

**Reduced expenses time from hours to minutes**

Expenses and task management apps are two of the most popular

new processes. Previously, expenses were slow and manual, and relied on individuals submitting the right expenses at the right time, against the right code. It took precious time away from people’s everyday tasks to concentrate solely on laborious expense claims. Now, they can do it quickly through their mobile device, from anywhere.

Nicola Haigh, Finance Systems Administrator explains, “The Unit4 expenses module is so fast and flexible. People could have spent hours doing expenses before; now it takes them minutes. They can attach photos of their receipts, for example, record mileage based on postcode-to-postcode or GPS, look at their expense history, and gain authorization so much more quickly. If a claim is delayed, they receive a reminder. The only intervention is when a member of the payroll staff checks the expense claim. Other than that, it’s all automated.”

Users can also access the task app on the go and perform functions such as requisitions, purchase orders, and invoice approval, as well as expenses approval. This has been especially beneficial while staff is working remotely during the Covid-19 disruption. The roll-out of the task app was itself fast-tracked because of the pandemic.

Housing association finance management is faster, too. Process automation, quicker reporting, and ease of use have all cut the time and resources needed to complete many key tasks, including:

- Month-end accruals now completed within three days of end of month, versus 10 days previously

- Year-end finance system reporting completed within 10 days
- Financial statements are signed off one month faster than before
- Fixed assets for component accounting used to involve a complex spreadsheet — covering 20,000 homes, each with 10 components, such as heating, windows, kitchen, etc. It now resides in a simple, shared Unit4 format, with a rapid, flexible reporting capability

The other great advantage of the Unit4 platform is its adaptability. Accent has changed a great deal over the last decade, following acquisitions and divestments. Throughout, the ERP system has evolved to meet Accent’s needs. Today the entire business – housing, capital, leasehold management, and development – all rely on Unit4 for timely, complete, and accurate financial information. “There’s no messing about with Unit4. It’s quick, adaptive, and easy. It’s also designed with the user in mind. People can be productive almost immediately,” says Nicola.

