

Agile, intelligent financial planning and analysis drives improved service and increased operational efficiency



East of England Ambulance Service NHS Trust



Using Unit4 Finance Planning and Analysis (FP&A), the East of England Ambulance Service NHS Trust is making fast, trusted financial planning decisions that help drive improved service and increased efficiency. The cloud-based system – tightly integrated with the Trust’s highly successful Unit4 Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) platform – also frees more resources to concentrate on strategic tasks.

Key benefits include:

- Single platform addresses financial planning, from planning cash flow and managing operational budgets, to forecasting monthly costs
- Financial budgeting and forecasting now one third faster – as well as timelier and more accurate
- Supports upcoming IFRS 16 public sector lease compliance spanning 1,500 leases
- Implemented in two months with minimal training required for non-technical users

24x7x365 emergency services for 6.2 million people

The East of England Ambulance Service NHS Trust provides around-the-clock accident and emergency services to those in need of emergency medical treatment and transport in Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire, Essex, Norfolk, Suffolk, and Cambridgeshire. The area comprises approximately 6.2 million citizens, across 7,500 square miles, and every year the Trust receives more than one million emergency calls.

The Trust enjoys an existing, highly successful partnership with Unit4. Up to 40 users in Finance, Procurement, and Supplier Management rely on a cloud-based Unit4 ERP solution to support agile, automated finance management. Following go-live, the team benefits from complete visibility and control of key financial processes from any device, with fast, informed decisions made from one shared view of data.

Industry

Public Sector: Healthcare

Location

Melbourn, U.K.

Size

A&E services across six U.K. counties, covering 6.2 million citizens; 1,500 leases under management

Product

Unit4 Financial Planning & Analysis (FP&A)

Challenges

Eliminate reliance on manual, fragmented spreadsheets for emergency services budget planning and forecasting. Make it faster and easier for budget holders to administer budgets.

Key metrics

1/3

Faster finance planning and analysis

6 weeks

Time to deploy Unit4 FP&A

“With Unit4 FP&A we can see over the horizon. Our planning insights are now all wrapped in one shared, accurate system. We can view previous budgets, track year-to-date spend, see forecasts for the coming year, and reallocate budget where necessary.”

Darren Ward

Senior Finance Analyst, East of England Ambulance Service Trust

At the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, for example, this agile, accurate ERP platform provided the Trust with critical insights to monitor PPE inventory daily. By understanding the precise equipment levels in near real time, the Trust was able to re-stock supplies and ensure reliable protection for healthcare professionals and patients.

Continual innovation

The Trust is always looking to the future, exploring innovative new ways to drive improved service and operational efficiency. This is where Unit4 FP&A comes in. Darren Ward, Senior Finance Analyst, explains why the Trust chose to implement the cloud software solution.

“We have more than 100 budget stakeholders running our services, and they were performing budget management manually,” he says. “A reliance on spreadsheets meant there was no coherent approach to how budgets were set by each team. It was also challenging to monitor budget performance against target as the year progressed. Unit4 demonstrated the capabilities of FP&A and we quickly made the decision to implement it for the forthcoming financial year.”

Close, expert collaboration between the Ambulance Service and Unit4 enabled FP&A to be developed and launched in just six weeks – well in time for this new financial year. The solution blends automated financial planning and analysis, budget management, and financial forecasting with highly interactive dashboards and powerful, pre-configured models. “We were productive almost immediately,” says Darren. “Our non-technical management accountants needed only minimal training.”

The outcome: intelligent, trusted insight into every budget, ranging from frontline operations and the vehicle fleet, to estate running costs across 140 sites and income from the NHS Commissioning Groups.

“We now have a single platform to address the Trust’s financial planning needs, from planning cash flow and managing operational budgets, to forecasting monthly costs,” says Darren. “The powerful budgeting and forecasting functionality enables our team of management accountants to plan and manage risk much more effectively.”

One of the great advantages of FP&A is dashboard. For example, the budget manager in charge of the 1,200-strong vehicle fleet can see the summary cost of the fleet, or drill down in granular detail, such as unit purchase cost per vehicle, running costs over a given period, and historical costs to date. The same high quality data is shared with other relevant managers so everyone is on the same page.

According to Robert Abery, Management Accountant, East of England Ambulance Service NHS Trust, this agile reporting changes the way the Trust looks at data. “We can now analyze, report, and share the finance data quickly and easily, drilling down to individual transactions and automatically distribute the reports to other stakeholders. Compared with spreadsheets, our financial budgeting and forecasting is one third faster – and the data is dramatically more timely and accurate.”

Pre-built for IFRS 16 compliance

Looking to the future, the solution also prepares the Trust for the advent of the International Financial Reporting Standard 16 (IFRS 16) next year, which changes the way NHS providers account for leases, removing the distinction between operating and finance leases. A pre-built, automated Unit4 IFRS 16 solution will allow the team to easily manage large volumes of leasing data by providing data collection, calculations, reporting, and disclosures – ultimately ensuring compliance for IFRS 16.

“Collecting, structuring, and documenting the existing 1,500 leases under management is a major challenge. It would be almost impossible using spreadsheets,” he says. “Using the Unit4 IFRS 16 solution, we can import all of the lease contracts quickly and easily. We can then identify the effects of accounting for each contract, and aggregate those to different cost centers. We then have a pre-defined template for transferring the lease data to our integrated Unit4 ERP platform.”

He concludes, “With Unit4 FP&A we can see over the horizon. Our planning insights are now all wrapped in one shared, accurate system. We can view previous budgets, track year-to-date spend, see forecasts for the coming year, and reallocate budget where necessary. Armed with these insights, the Ambulance Service can deliver better, more efficient service across the East of England.”