

CLIENT CASE STUDY

Choosing, implementing and managing performance with Covalent at Pennaf Housing Group

The Pennaf Housing Group selected Covalent as its corporate performance management solution in April 2007. Following implementation and training, Covalent was rolled out across the organisation.

Covalent has exceeded Pennaf's performance management aims and has proved an invaluable tool for the Housing Group. The structure and discipline provided by the software has resulted in a more robust approach to performance management and significantly enhanced the Group's performance management culture.

Our performance management aims

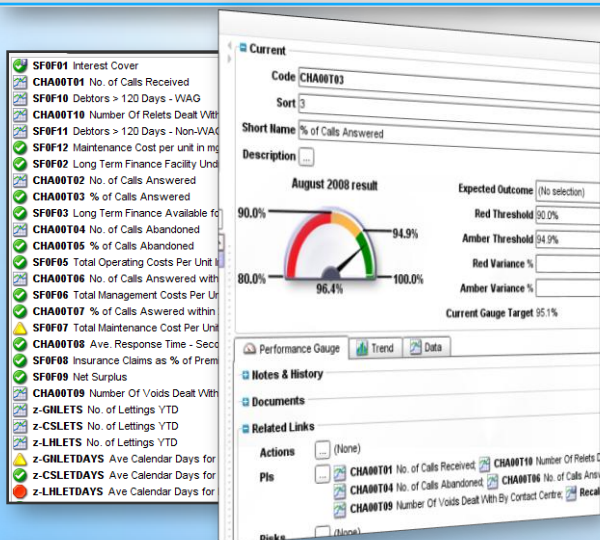
'We wanted to strengthen our reporting capabilities and make the transition from historic performance reporting to proactive performance management. By providing early warning of falling performance to the right person at the right time, we could focus performance management action where it is needed and improve the outcome.'

'The first step to improving performance is knowing how well we are performing now so we wanted a system which would provide complete visibility of current performance and performance trends. Although performance reporting to senior management and the Board was sufficient to prompt the right questions to be asked, reporting at manager, team leader and individual level was not sufficiently developed to easily provide the answers. We needed the ability to drill down from a top level overview of performance and to quickly identify and rectify areas of poor performance. Performance of individuals in the same activity varies considerably so we wanted a system that would help us to understand the reasons for these variances and help us set appropriate targets. Furthermore, we wanted to strengthen our 'Golden Thread' - the link between the Group's vision, high-level objectives and individual objectives.'

'Before purchasing the software, we made some independent enquiries with existing Covalent customers. They were delighted with the system and with the service provided by Covalent. In fact their endorsements of Covalent made us confident that we weren't just buying a system; we were identifying a partner to work with.'

'We chose Covalent because we knew that it had the functionality to allow us to achieve our aims. It is graphically rich, intuitive and simple to use. This was important because we aimed to role it out to all our staff as the tool to manage their own objectives. Moreover it was good value for money.'

Brian Wooster, Business Improvement Manager, Pennaf Housing Group



Implementing Covalent

From the start, capturing detailed information using Covalent proved to be far easier than Pennaf had anticipated. Creating a structured action plan helped them to achieve implementation quickly and simply.

Covalent provided the templates to create PIs, actions and risks before the Housing Group purchased the system so they began by setting these up. Within 2 days of receiving System Administrator training Pennaf had set up 1200 PIs and within 5 days they had populated them with data and tested that all the formulas were working correctly.

As soon as the order to buy the system was sent to Covalent the software was available to Pennaf. Covalent is a hosted system, so there was no lengthy and expensive implementation and no impact on the organisation's very busy IS department. Users can log in anywhere they have internet access, and members of Pennaf's Senior Management Team are able to work from home.

The results

'Covalent has allowed us to accomplish all the things we wanted to achieve and more besides. Using the software has highlighted gaps in our approach and we have now developed a much stronger performance management process as a result.'

'We bought Covalent because we thought it was the best tool to help performance management across the Group and this is proving to be the case. Covalent brings structure and discipline to performance management. A key and unexpected advantage has been that the implementation process has highlighted several areas where our performance management was not as good as we thought it was. Addressing these weaknesses has helped us develop a more robust performance management framework.'

Brian Wooster, Pennaf Housing Group

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Mainstreaming our risk management approach

'Covalent has improved the discipline and structure of our performance management processes

'To use one example, we wanted to mainstream our risk management, to determine and to mitigate risks, and to link them with our relevant action plans and PIs. When we uploaded our risk plans onto Covalent, we found that there were a number of weaknesses to our current approach. Covalent systematically highlighted a number of areas that didn't 'fit' and we were able to make positive improvements to our risk management approach as a result.'

Brian Wooster, Pennaf Housing Group



Iterative, robust target setting

'Using Covalent helped us to identify that our approach to target setting was too simplistic. As a result we have developed new target setting methodologies in key areas.

'For example, we used to set rent arrears percentage targets and this was then applied universally to all housing offices. In reality, however, housing patches can have very different management issues and required targets that reflect those differences. The iterative process we have developed allows us to set realistic improvement targets for each housing office and model the effect on the activity and Group as a whole. We can assess if the overall improvement is on target to achieve upper quartile performance within the desired timescale.'

Brian Wooster, Pennaf Housing Group

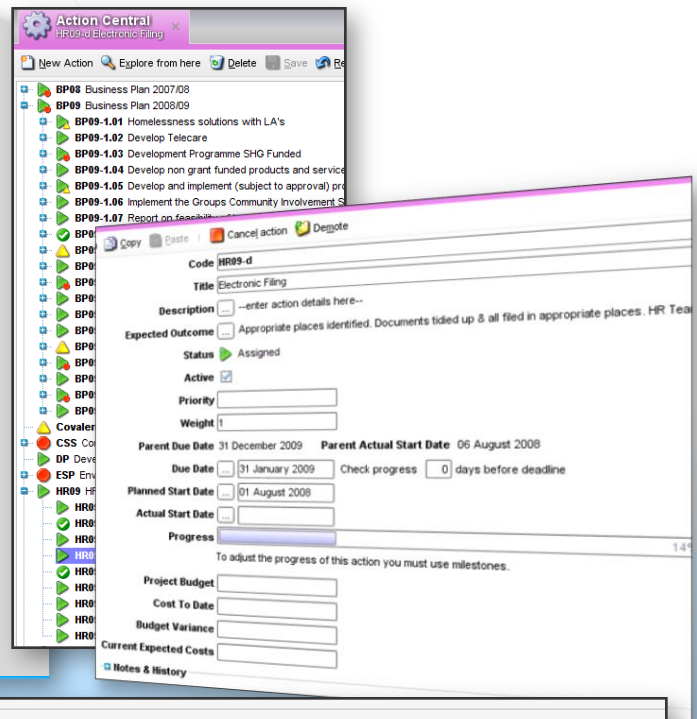
Improving capacity planning

'Implementing Covalent helped us to realise that we were not as good at action planning as we thought.

'As an organisation we produce lots of action plans, but when we tried to input them in to Covalent we found they were not very SMART. We tended to monitor activity rather than outcomes, resource planning was limited and actions either complete or not complete.

'We recognised that Covalent's ability to monitor how complete actions are was a big step forward. We understood that progress at project level was driven by the weighting and percentage complete at leaf and milestone level. We considered using percentages for leaf level action and milestone weightings but quickly realised that using the estimated number of person days to complete the task would provide some basic capacity planning. It would also take account of the relative size of different projects.'

Brian Wooster, Pennaf Housing Group



Milestones					
Description	Completed?	Due Date	Weight	Notes	
1. Identify which categories of document need to be filed in which place & develop summary matrix	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	31/08/08	1	Review n	
2. Deliver training session for HR Team members	<input type="checkbox"/>	31/10/08	1		
3. Tidy up electronic files for Team & ensure all transferred to appropriate places	<input type="checkbox"/>	31/12/08	5		

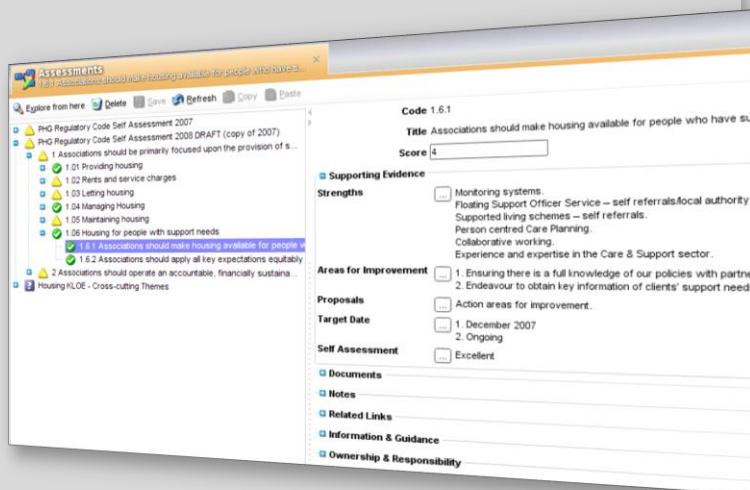
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Supporting self-assessments with the Models module

'When we bought Covalent, Models had been created for the KLOEs (Key Lines Of Enquiry) used by the Audit Commission when inspecting Housing Associations in England. I asked Covalent to create a model for the Welsh Assembly Government's (WAG) self-assessment against the Regulatory Code for RSLs in Wales, which they promptly did. In practice, the self-assessment was so easy to use. Within an hour I had cut and pasted last year's self-assessment into Covalent and copied it to create the first draft of this year's. Within two hours I had gone through each question and linked all appropriate PIs and actions plans. Within three hours I had modified a standard report that included all the information I wanted.

'The report containing the draft self-assessment, current PI data and progress with current action plans was used by the two Chairs and director who facilitated an away day for board members, managers and senior management to complete the 2008 self-assessment. This method was significantly better than the blank page approach used in previous years. The PI performance data and action plan progress was very useful in arriving at a judgement of current performance in each area. They also helped to make judgements less subjective and more evidence based, making the whole self assessment exercise more robust and efficient.'

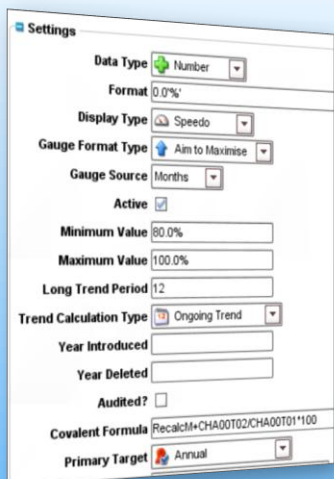
Brian Wooster, Pennaf Housing Group



Aiding validation with PI formulas

Pennaf use Covalent to record not only the PI values but also the numerators and denominators that make up the PI. This provides greater context for the PI and improves understanding of performance, as well as aiding validation.

When the Housing Group first uploaded PI data onto the system, they used the Covalent Import Template. Due to volume of data and extensive use of formulas, the system was not able to cope with the number of calculations required. However, the Helpdesk team at Covalent turned a negative into a positive with their helpful attitude and rapid problem-solving.



Keeping it relevant and appropriate for users

'As a hosted system, Covalent has the potential to store large amounts of data. We knew that our implementation plans would result in a large increase in volume of information produced. To prevent information overload for users, we have used Covalent to personalise each item, so that only relevant and appropriate data is seen by individual users, depending on their role and responsibility.'

Brian Wooster, Pennaf Housing Group

