



Faster, more reliable reporting at Sanctuary Group

Sanctuary Group, a charitable organisation, is one of the UK's leading housing providers managing over 78,000 units of accommodation throughout England and Scotland.

The provision of housing lies at the heart of Sanctuary's activities but since the organisation was established in 1969 it has grown significantly, including expansion into the commercial activities of social care and facilities management.

With a turnover well in excess of £300 million and a total staff of over 7,000, Sanctuary Group has grown significantly and continues to do so.

AT A GLANCE

Company

- *Sanctuary Group - a provider of general rented, sheltered, supported, student and key worker accommodation and care homes.*

Solution

- *The SAP® BusinessObjects™ Planning and Consolidation application implemented by Opal Wave*

Benefits

- *Improved data quality*
- *Improved accuracy, integrity and reliability of reporting*
- *Reduced manual effort as reporting is automated*
- *Faster month-end close, allowing more time for business analysis*
- *Improved transparency and auditability*

"By bringing best practice ideas and suggestions to our attention its consultants really added value."

Aled Bath, Financial Controller

Increasingly complex reporting

Having undergone a rapid period of growth over the last five years, Sanctuary needed systems that were capable of keeping pace with increased reporting requirement needs. "With a number of different business streams, Sanctuary Group has a complex reporting structure," says Aled Bath, Group Financial Controller of Sanctuary.

"We were using a spreadsheet-based system, but we needed to move to a sophisticated electronic system that could not only cater for today's needs, but future growth."

Long-term transformation

Sanctuary Group was in the process of conducting a long-term finance transformation project. As part of this exercise, which would include improving the company's short and long-term planning processes, the organisation started to look for a new reporting solution. Sanctuary approached the supplier of its financial accounting software and also used reference material, such as Gartner research, to identify the most promising solutions, one of which was SAP BusinessObjects Planning and Consolidation.

"We were already successfully using a SAP BusinessObjects solution for the vast majority of the non-financial reports produced to monitor the performance of our housing business, so it was natural to include it on the list," says Aled.

Sharing the vision

The list was first of all narrowed down to three possibilities and then, after demonstrations and careful evaluation, Sanctuary Group chose SAP BusinessObjects Planning and Consolidation.

"We were impressed with the way that SAP BusinessObjects Planning and Consolidation integrated reporting with short and long term planning," says Aled. "We could have integrated the other solutions, but it wouldn't have been as tight."

"We also felt that SAP BusinessObjects Planning and Consolidation was a better fit with our long-term vision and overall business information strategy," Aled continues. "From our perspective, SAP BusinessObjects provided a solution that was ahead of the market."

Project leadership

Sanctuary wanted an implementation partner that had the necessary understanding of the product and the leadership and management skills to ensure a successful implementation.

During the evaluation phase Opal Wave, with its experience and deep understanding of both the technology and performance management processes, was identified as the best qualified implementation and support partner.

"Once we had taken the decision to use SAP BusinessObjects Planning and Consolidation, we felt comfortable asking Opal Wave to advise us and lead the project," says Aled.

Lift and shift

The scope of the project was deceptively simple; to reproduce the consolidation models in the spreadsheet-based system in SAP BusinessObjects Planning and Consolidation.

Opal Wave helped Sanctuary put together a cross-functional internal team, made up of experts from finance and IT. Through interactive workshops Opal Wave and the internal team conducted a thorough requirements



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analysis and produced a detailed design document, from which Opal Wave configured the new system.

As the implementation progressed Opal Wave's experts also trained super users, so that Sanctuary could become self sufficient in the creation of reports. "Opal Wave's project management expertise was invaluable," says Aled. "Their specialists were able to advise us about best practices. They were also very good at understanding the complexities and intricacies of our business and defining what would work best for Sanctuary."

Data quality

Configuring the system to reflect the existing reporting was relatively straightforward. However, data validation proved more difficult. Opal Wave integrated SAP BusinessObjects Planning and Consolidation with Sanctuary's financial accounting system, mirroring the accounting and purchasing hierarchies to drive greater consistency.

However, there were still challenges. "From the outset we knew that the improved controls in SAP BusinessObjects Planning and Consolidation would highlight any data quality issues, and they did," says Aled. "It certainly focused our minds on how we could improve the quality of our data and we have now increased the accuracy, reliability and integrity of our reporting. Opal Wave's input was instrumental in helping us do that."

Benefits

With SAP BusinessObjects Planning and Consolidation in place, reporting is more controlled and Sanctuary has great confidence in the accuracy of the reports it produces. In addition, with reports being produced automatically, the whole process is faster. "With the old system we could just about produce consolidated reports by the sixth working day of the month," says Aled. "Now we can do it reliably."

"We can also refresh the reports quickly. Whereas it used to take up to a day to produce a group consolidation, we can now do it in less than an hour. With reporting that is now effectively realtime, we have more time to analyse and understand what is happening, rather than spending time consolidating the numbers."

"The processes and rules within SAP BusinessObjects Planning and Consolidation make reporting more transparent and auditable," Aled continues. "I anticipate it will make things much easier for our auditors."

Future plans

Sanctuary Group and Opal Wave have now started work on the second phase of the finance transformation project - implementing the short and long-term planning capabilities of SAP BusinessObjects Planning and Consolidation.

Sanctuary Group has engaged all the key stakeholders and a comprehensive list of requirements has been drawn up. The company is now in discussions with Opal Wave about the best way to implement the solution.

"Currently we are producing weekly, monthly, annual and longer-term plans, but the processes for creating them are all different, which results in a lot of manual work and re-keying," says Aled.

"SAP BusinessObjects Planning and Consolidation will allow us to use one process for all of them, significantly reducing the number of steps needed and the speed at which we can plan. In addition, we will be able to use a single system for planning and reporting, improving our ability to measure our performance."

"Throughout the implementation of the reporting system Opal Wave did a very good job and continue to do so with the support they are providing to us," continues Aled.

"They brought leadership and specialist expertise to the project. And by bringing best practice ideas and suggestions to our attention its consultants really added value."

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