



Delivering a Complete Leisure Centre Transformation for Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council



Case Study

THE CHALLENGE

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council is located amongst the renowned tourist-orientated north coast of Northern Ireland. The challenge identified for the council in late 2015 was two-fold:

- to develop a new leisure centre to replace the ageing facility in Coleraine Town Centre, which is the major conurbation in the council area. The ageing leisure centre is increasingly costly to operate, and is becoming so dated that income and admissions are reducing; and
- to provide an alternative to Waterworld, an indoor water activity centre in Portrush, a major tourist town within the council area

The council's objectives for the project were to ensure that:

- the health and wellbeing of their local population and seasonal visitors would be improved through better facilities and improving the offering to encourage participation
- value for money would be secured in both the alternative development and operating model costs
- the existing overall subsidy would be reduced

As part of a multi-disciplinary team that also included speciality lawyers and architects, V4S were appointed to provide support, financial analysis and sector-specific advice on all aspects of the project, including initial feasibility, site evaluation, the Outline Business Case (OBC) and the design development. V4S also provided support in the options appraisal for the management of the facilities and have been engaged subsequently for a range of other related project activities.

Richard Baker, Director of Leisure & Development - "The Council have worked with the team from V4 Services for over 7 years now, on various leisure investment related projects. Through their hard work and commitment, they have become trusted advisors and, in many respects, they feel more like our business partners rather than traditional consultants. They are always accessible, responsive to our needs and in many cases have had to work to tight deadlines. It's an overused term, but they are genuinely "hands on".

THE SOLUTION

Since 2015, V4S has provided advice and support as well as delivering significant and innovative outputs. It began with the development of the initial business case included:

- Area needs assessment
- extensive engagement with officers and Members
- working with the design team and cost consultants to identify the optimal facility mix
- analysis of the different potential sites
- potential partnerships with public sector bodies
- operating models available
- funding options/affordability

The business case concluded that the options explored could provide a best fit to meet the Council's objectives but further work on the potential costs of operating the facilities was required.

In 2018 V4S successfully completed an Early Market Engagement process to assess the markets appetite to operating CC&G's leisure estate. Post V4S's report, the project board agreed that the in-house team should have the opportunity to demonstrate their ability.

During 2019, V4S developed 'procurement style' documents including a specification, evaluation criteria and weightings. This process was aligned to a Competition with Negotiation but minus the selection stage.

The in-house operational team provided a business plan for the first 5 years including an investment plan of £1m and method statements to cover thirteen areas of operation from maintenance to sales and marketing. They investigated new and more effective methods of working with their corporate counterparts leading to agreement on service level agreements.

Following evaluation, V4S completed a comparator report for the Project Board before its presentation to full council meeting in March 2020. This coincided with the start of the Covid-19 pandemic – the impact of which was that the decision to move forward on the project on hold. Although in the months from the completion of their 'bid' to March 2020, the In-house team commenced the implementation of their business plan until staff were either re-allocated to critical services or furloughed, which halted their work.

OUTCOMES

A project of this magnitude will always have complications and, although to date the council and its residents have not received the potential health benefits of a new or at least improved leisure facilities in Coleraine and Portrush, the new approach within the in-house team will be of significant benefit in the future. The process they embraced has transformed their relationships with the other council department, their approach to operating the sites and provided focus to how to improve their operations to the benefit of their customers.

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