



Developing Northern Ireland's flagship £35m leisure facility

Overview

South Lake Leisure Centre is the flagship leisure facility within Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council; one of the largest projects for V4 Services in the Northern Ireland leisure sector and was the most ambitious project in the Council's capital investment programme. Located overlooking the stunning Craigavon Lake, the new state of the art facility offers a 50-metre pool, the largest gym in Northern Ireland (over 150 stations), an 8-court sports hall, multiple studios, and a health and wellbeing suite with vitality pool, a children's leisure pool, a soft play zone and a social enterprise-operated café.

The Challenge

One of the most significant recent investments in health and wellbeing in Northern Ireland, the £35m facility development needed to:

- Meet the needs of a growing population.
- Provide for increased demand for a range of world class sport and leisure facilities to cater for the needs of the local community as well and the needs of elite athletes from across the region.
- Ensure that the new centre is affordable and costs less to operate than the three older facilities that it replaces.

The V4 specialist leisure team was selected by the Council to provide consultancy advice and support throughout the entire project lifecycle, from preliminary concept and master planning to design, implementation, and aftercare. The multidisciplinary team combined experience across leisure (strategic and operational expertise), financial, procurement, and sales and marketing to ensure the project was delivered efficiently and that any challenges were quickly and effectively overcome.

“ V4 provided total commitment to achieving our project objectives and have been very hands-on, applying their wide-ranging sector knowledge across all aspects of the project and creating a real culture change in how people behave. The team were dedicated to the project and the timeline and wholly supported the council during the pandemic, ensuring safe and controlled management and support. I would have no hesitation in recommending the V4S team to any other authority that needs to turn their vision into reality. ”

Mark Parkinson, Strategic Director People at ABC council



To find out how V4 Services can help you with your next project, please get in touch.



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The Solution

Over the course of the project, the V4 team delivered a number of services including:

- Early-stage affordability.
- Economic appraisal / business case.
- Needs analysis.
- Business planning support.
- Procurement support and advice.
- Service-wide transformation to deliver improvements, utilising evidence-based practices to drive all decision-making throughout the process.

The business case developed by V4 was predicated on a rationalisation plan that involved the replacement of three older facilities in the Craigavon area with this world-class facility. Whole life savings were generated to fund the capital costs and to reduce dependency on council funding in the long-term.

After completing the business case and developing the investment strategy, the team also provided strategic advice and support initially around the various options to implement the decision. The team completed a comprehensive Options Appraisal to consider the full range of management options, including outsourcing, deployment of a local authority trading company (LATCo) and in-house management (supported by a major transformation programme).

The Outcomes

In a project of this size, issues naturally arise. However, by addressing them constructively and with new approaches, the V4S team assisted in:

- Breaking down the barriers to transformation through regular review meetings held across the council, allowing new relationships to develop and different departments to highlight areas that needed consideration based on their specific expertise. This process has linked significantly into the successful development of the SLAs.
- Developing the project board's understanding and increasing their commercial approach to operations by applying evidence-based decision-making.
- Established and improved working relationships with the three main trade unions within the Council by fully integrating representatives in the design stage of work and the implementation of new working practices, including regular workshops and weekly meetings.
- Quick and more agile methods of working e.g. HR processes.
- Increased use of technology i.e. Gladstone, Listen 360, CoursePro.



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