

CEW AWARDS 2012

Torfaen County Borough Council – CLIENT OF THE YEAR

INTRODUCTION/OVERVIEW

Local authorities had traditionally procured their construction works on a project by project basis. Torfaen County Borough Council decided to do things differently. In 2005 it formalised a single contractor framework agreement with Kier Construction, based in Newport and Kier's design team partners (architects Powell Dobson and engineering consultants Bingham Hall and Hoare Lea). The agreement was initially for five years, but was later extended for a further two.

The council wished to improve the delivery of educational and community regeneration projects through a more effective procurement process that would promote collaborative working and establish a model of best practice. It also hoped to develop a partnership ethos that would engage stakeholders and strengthen community involvement in its construction programme.

PROCESS

Traditionally Torfaen had designed their own projects in-house and then procured contractors relatively late into the project process. However, from the commencement of the framework they decided to out-source their design capability for major projects but retain and focus on in-house project management to improve communication and stakeholder management and to clarify decision making. Kier took responsibility for the design team, acting as a single point of contact for the construction management of schemes.

From the start the main focus was on meeting end user needs. Stakeholders were involved in projects at an early stage, and meetings would be held throughout the process to share information and ensure all parties were satisfied and fully engaged.

Great efforts were made to promote collaboration and team working. Project teams were often co-located on site to improve communications and problem-solving. Collaborative working workshops were rolled out across framework projects to integrate project teams and ensure staff were drawn into the behaviours and processes behind the partnering ethos. Framework review workshops ensured that lessons learnt fed into future projects. A key outcome of the collaboration was the improved approach to risk management with greater understanding and sensible allocation of risks to each party.

The seven-year duration of the framework enabled long-term working relationships to develop based on openness, honesty and trust. Many positive practices were cultivated, including a collaborative approach to achieving best value, honest and open communication, a shared approach to mitigating risk, commitment to continuous improvement, and showcasing of best practice. Work processes were standardised across the framework to streamline administration and eliminate wasteful duplication of paperwork.

RESULTS

The framework has delivered a total of 12 educational and community regeneration projects worth nearly £80 million. All projects were delivered within budget and schedule, and all showed improved customer satisfaction. The council defined a number of performance measures, including reportable accident rates, client satisfaction and number of local workers employed. Over the seven-year period, the framework team improved and exceeded all KPI requirements. The focus on continuous improvement meant that the final three projects were delivered with zero defects, zero reportable accidents, low levels of waste to landfill and high levels of local employment

Jeff Tucker of Powell Dobson summarises the strengths of the framework in delivering Torfaen council's construction programme: 'Having worked with Torfaen CBC as part of the Kier framework team since 2005, I can say that the framework arrangement has provided a number of benefits over a more traditional project by project procurement process. These principally include the ability of the entire design and delivery team to react to changing funding and demand-led client priorities in a very rapid way, continuity of relationships leading to more efficient programme timescales and year on year improvement in the standard of service provided to Torfaen. We have had very positive feedback from the Torfaen construction teams, teachers and pupils on the schools delivered under the framework'.

Torfaen council's staff has also learnt from the framework. Dana Eynon, special projects programme manager, commented: 'The team have developed their own skills through management of this framework. Risks and challenges were discussed in a very healthy environment. Individual team members have grown and the team as a whole is better placed to move forward in whatever ventures arise from 21st century schools programme.'

The continuity of work made the delivery of community benefits more sustainable with significant work opportunities for local young people and many community engagement activities. One important legacy is the development of a community benefits programme that was used to great effect on the Blaenavon Community Campus project (winner of the CEW community benefits award). The judges were impressed with the committed, strategic approach shown by the project team, and the

programme provides an excellent template for other community-oriented projects to follow. Over a period of 7 years this partnership approach has supported a complete transformation in the way that the client delivers its construction programmes and has provided a lead for other client organisations to follow.