

BOX 6.6 COVENTRY: CV ONE



Coventry city centre

Throughout the 1980s Coventry gradually lost its city centre shopping trade to new out-of-town retail centres. If business was to be attracted to the centre, an initiative was required that would improve the physical character, build up the marketing profile of the central area, and regain the trust of the private sector. In 1996 the council took the step of creating an independent not-for-profit city centre management company – CV One. The move did not involve privatising the council’s building assets, but the council did contract out the management of the entire city centre area to the new company. The company was charged with attracting new investment through a dedicated commercial focus on the city centre that the previous ‘silo’-based council department had not been able to take.

The company received start-up funding from the council, which demonstrated the council’s commitment, and represented the crucial first step in earning the confidence of the private sector. It was given a five-year contract (currently renewed on a year-by-year basis) to provide maintenance services and to use

environmental improvements to lever further revenue. Under the strong leadership of CV One’s CEO, from 1998–2001 the ten-year decline in footfall was reversed and some £2.4m extra revenue was generated for environmental improvements.

Maintenance has improved, and proactive marketing through the press and events has attracted new interest, but much of the achievement of CV One stems from the relationships established by CV One with business, for example through its Business Membership Scheme. Retailers pay a membership fee to join the scheme which CV One invests in improvements to the city centre. The associated Business Forum provides CV One with a vehicle through which to coordinate the different interests and offer a lobbying route to the council to direct future investment.

The company benefits from both a clear mandate, flexibility, and clear geographical operational boundaries. Provided the company’s overall business plan is approved each year by council and it continues to meet its contract, it is able to undertake other activities as it wishes under the direction of its board. As an independent entity, CV One is free from council procurement regulations, allowing it to be flexible in sub-contracting maintenance and managing those contracts to high-performance standards. It is able to generate, and similarly spend, its own revenue, and resources can be easily redirected where there is a problem to be solved.

they did contribute, it was generally only as far as the public spaces that directly interfaced with their businesses.

The private sector, as public space contractor, represented a further relationship highlighted by the case studies. In this regard, the private sector may provide numerous services, but the most common seemed to be street sweeping and cleansing, and waste-collection services. Interviewees suggested that local authorities are generally less antagonistic to the use of private contractors in the post-CCT environment, although perceptions of public space contractors were rarely positive, and generally suggested a concern for the quality of the service delivered. Nevertheless, authorities did recognise the value of private sector contractors for their specialised knowledge or for the services that the council could not always provide, including tree surgery or chewing gum removal from pavements.

A key lesson from the 20 authorities seemed to be the need to recognise where and how best to involve other stakeholders in public space management, be that the community, private sector, or other public bodies. Generally there was little hesitation in using the private sector

where they could do the same quality of job for less. A broad acceptance also existed that the private sector, in a range of guises – from owners of space, to managers, to commercially interested parties – has an important role to play in managing public space, and that this energy, interest and source of resources and best practice should be harnessed wherever it exists. A wide variety of approaches and models were apparent to achieve this, which not only had the potential to deliver resource savings, but also to raise the profile of public space management services. Despite this, there was no support for a more dramatic move towards a market-centred model of public space management.

Challenges facing local authorities

There was considerable consensus regarding the key problems and challenges associated with managing public space, which can be grouped into three main categories: investment, regulation, and maintenance, whilst the coordination of these issues was an overarching concern. As