

Waitomo Caves Discovery Centre

Long Term Plan Submission for Renewal of Service Level Agreement and Funding of One-Off Costs

Summary

Our current Service Level Agreement with Council finishes on 30 June 2018. We are hopeful that Council will not only consider renewing the SLA but increasing the annual amount of \$8,300 that we currently receive towards district information, booking and promotion services, to additionally include a contribution towards the new i-Site Manager's role, which we believe has significantly raised the performance of the centre, for the benefit of the Waitomo District. The proposed increase will also bring the level of council funding in line with the level of contribution councils make to comparable I-Sites nationally.

We also request that the Council contribute to a number of one-off costs that the Discovery Centre is incurring.

Current contribution

District info & Booking \$6000

District promotion \$2,300

Discovery Centre/Museum \$5,400

Public good – toilets \$20,500, Refuse \$2,800

The SLA is based on promoting strong heritage, visitor information and public good services for the district by:

- Acting as custodian to our district's heritage
- Promoting the district's visitor attractions
- Providing quality information and booking services to local, national and international visitors
- Providing public good services through the provision of 24 hour toilet and rubbish collection services

The services we provide at Waitomo Caves Discovery Centre assist the Council to achieve a number of Community Outcomes included in the LTP:

- CO1 Multi Cultural Values
- CO2 A place for all age groups to enjoy
- CO3 A place where young people access opportunities
- CO5 Preserving the environment
- CO6 A place that attracts people to live, work and play

Over the past 3 years the WCMS has faithfully and effectively fulfilled its commitments under the 2015-2018 SLA.

We have expanded and improved our information services, with significant investment in staffing, training, networking with RTOS, operators and other i-Sites, and raising our service standards.

- Visitor numbers through the i-Site over the past 3 years have been
2015/6 155,000
2016/7 175,000
2017/9 192,000
- Performance of the i-Site has improved markedly. Staff turnover has reduced, with a corresponding improvement in staff service levels and morale.
- We have very high customer satisfaction ratings on google and Trip Advisor. Our Trip Advisor ratings average 4.5/5.
- We are one of only 8 I-Sites in New Zealand that produce a surplus without significant subsidy from a local body, or other funding sources
- We have become much more engaged with the RTO and other i-Sites, which is having a noticeable effect on awareness of Waitomo and flow of information around the region and out to visitors.

Deloitte I-Site Annual Survey 2017

This survey provides performance reporting across all i-Sites in New Zealand.

Key Points:

- 81 I-Sites in Network
- 8 made a surplus before local govt/RTO/EDA support. Down from 10 in each of 3 previous surveys
- The Waitomo I-Site performs exceptionally well in regard to:
 - Numbers of visitors
 - Commission revenue
 - Visitors served per staff FTE
 - Numbers of transactions per FTE
 - Ratio of bookings per visitor
- The level of council subsidy per visitor is remarkably low at \$0.22 per visitor
- Subsidy support increased 8% for Small Tourist Centre I-sites in 2016/7 year. WDC subsidy of Waitomo I-Site is equivalent to 4% of operating costs.

	Waitomo	Total (77)	Small Tourist I-Sites (10)	Trust (12)
Number of in-person visitors	175k	97,190	99,354	70,165
Booking transactions	17,741	7,744	6,351	5,127
Av value/booking	\$151	\$109	\$114	\$118

Staff FTE	5	3.9	3.0	2.8
Commission revenue	230k	\$93k	\$82k	\$71k
Brochure/subs rev	22k	\$38k	\$33k	\$21k
Staff costs	186k	\$197k	\$150k	\$132k
Total Expenses	204k	\$328	\$243k	\$208
Local govt/EDA/RTO subsidy	\$38.5k	\$148k	\$71k	\$72
Local govt/EDA/RTO subsidy per total visitor	\$0.22	\$3.66	\$0.70	\$3.40
Total visitors per staff FTE	35,000	22,070	28,413	25,543
Booking transactions per FTE	3,548	1,336	1,748	1300
Booking per x visitors	10	29	46	42

Our Services

Waitomo i-Site provides full service (incl booking, ticketing, collecting payment, paying supplier).

The I-Site also provides:

- Post & local mail services
- Free WiFi

We are in the process of planning:

- Computer system upgrade,
- Redesign of the website to provide better online information and booking,
- Improved museum and local information displays and signage
- Designing new counter in I-Site

The Board is currently developing new strategy for the future of the museum.

All these things contribute significantly to the objectives contained in our SLA, and are being funded by the Waitomo Discovery Centre.

The main criticisms that we receive are around the physical attributes of the centre; the toilets, the rubbish bins and the signage at Waitomo. When compared to i-sites in other major tourism locations around New Zealand the impressions visitors get when they arrive in Waitomo, spend time in the village, and use our toilet facilities, are not as good as they could be.

Improving signage, providing better rubbish facilities, and improving toilet facilities would go a long way to improving the impressions visitors have of Waitomo.

We suggest that the Waitomo District Council should be contributing more significantly to these costs and assisting us to further raise our game.

Specific Requests

- **Replacement of 4 public rubbish bins.**

The current bins are several years old and looking very scruffy, and in some disrepair. They are smaller than most public rubbish bins and sometimes need emptying more than once per day. The absence of other bins means that campervan tourists are often leaving rubbish bags in the bins. It is proposed the existing bins be replaced by larger, new bins.

- **Contribution to upgrading and maintaining toilets**

The SLA includes providing public good services through the provision of 24 hour toilet facilities. The centre provides five toilets, four of which are open 7 days per week during i-Site hours, and one which is 24 hours. All of these are used by the public continually whilst open.

The poor condition, lack of amenities including nappy changing table and sanitation disposal, and the difficulty of keeping the toilets clean with the high and increasing visitor numbers to Waitomo creates a negative impression on visitors.

Until the proposed new toilets are built in 2019/20 we request that Council assists with the following one-off costs:

- Retiling of 24 hour toilet with non-slip tiles
- Replacement of vinyl in other toilets to remove smell. The current vinyl has deteriorated and smells of urine.
- New nappy changing station. There is currently no nappy change facility in the village.
- Nappy disposal service
- Additional sanitation bin servicing. Until recently there was only one sanitary napkin disposal bin change per month. This meant that staff were often having to empty the single bin themselves prior to the change. We have recently begun fortnightly changes at our cost.

- **New gazebo**

It is important that the i-Site is able to represent and promote the Waitomo District at events away from its premises. This was demonstrated recently at the Te Kuiti Muster where we used a borrowed gazebo.

We suggest a gazebo with i-Site branding that can be used by both -Sites be purchased.

- **Contribution to new signage**

The current signage outside the i-Site, and on the approach to the village, is dated and scruffy. It has poor visibility. Improved signage would improve visitation numbers, help to tidy up the village and improve visitor experience.

- **Funding to buy Defibrillator.**

There is no defibrillator in the Waitomo village. THL has one at the main cave. With the high numbers of visitors coming through the village and into the I-Site and museum we believe a defib unit should be available onsite as a matter of public safety. This is becoming standard practice in IiSites around the country.

- **Contribution to website upgrade**

With the demise of Destination Waitomo the i-Site website is now the only unbiased local online source of information about Waitomo. Waitomo Caves Discovery Centre website is very dated and not very functional for online bookings. Users cannot make real-time bookings.

A new website is being planned. It will function as a key information portal for the Waitomo district. Nationally increasing numbers of information enquiries and bookings are being made online, reducing proportion made across the counter of i-Sites.

With plans well advanced to upgrade the i-Site's computer system, and the website upgrade to follow that, we confidently expect service to continue improving.

- **Contribution to IiSite counter replacement**

It is proposed a new counter be designed and installed. The interior of the i-site is inefficiently laid out. The existing counter is poorly designed and is very difficult for staff to stand at and interact effectively with customers. A new counter will improve service, reduce waiting times and improve staff performance.

- **Contribution to i-Site staffing costs**

Currently WDC contributes \$8,300 to operating costs of the i-Site. This equates to about 5 cents for each visitor we assist. As detailed above the increase in numbers of visitors to the i-Site in the past year is close to 20%, with an average of around 450 per day across the whole year, and over 2000 on peak days. Many visitors simply want information about the Waitomo District, without any payment for that service.

We suggest that Waitomo District is benefitting significantly for this service and that there should be more support of the cost of it. In the past 3 years those costs, particularly staff costs, have increased significantly as service levels have improved.

Across comparable i-Sites (Small Tourist Centre classification in Deloitte survey) the average level of subsidy is 8% of operating costs. The current level of subsidy Waitomo I-Site receives from WDC is 4% (\$8300 of \$204,000 total operating costs). We request that the contribution is increased from \$8,300 to \$16,320, being 8% of operating costs.

Summary

Item	Requested contribution	% of total cost
Contribution to I-Site services (this includes District Information & Booking Service, and District Promotion Service)	\$16,320 + gst p.a.	8%
Discovery Centre	\$6,000 + gst p.a	3%
Public Good Service	\$25,000 + gst p.a	
Purchase of larger, replacement rubbish bins x 5?	\$4,000 + gst	100%
Replacement of vinyl flooring on public toilet floors	\$3075 + gst	100%
Retile 24 hour toilet with non-slip tiles	\$4000 + gst	100%
Contribution to new signage	\$1000 + gst	50%
New gazebo	\$2500 + gst	100%
Contribution to new defibrillator	\$1250 + gst	50%
Contribution to i-site website upgrade ¹	\$2000 + gst	13%
Total Request for 2018/9 year	\$65,145 + gst	

The ongoing funding once one-off payments made is \$47,320 + gst. We assume this would be adjusted annually to allow for increased costs. This is an increase of \$8,820 over 2017 funding. The total request for one-off contributions is \$23,825 + gst.

¹ Website Upgrade. The budget for the website upgrade is \$15,000. We propose that WDC contribute the lesser of \$2,000 + gst, or 20% of the total cost.