

Case Study



Catalyze supports Bristol City Council in agreeing £12m of budget savings

Services

Strategic Portfolio Management, Decision Conferencing, Multi-Criteria Decision Analysis (MCDA)



Situation

Bristol City Council (BCC) has faced the significant challenge of continuing to provide high quality frontline services whilst making unprecedented budget savings. In order to meet the new spending limit of £330m, further savings of £42m needed to be identified between 2012 and 2015. This required the BCC Strategic Leadership Team to make key strategic choices which will shape the way current and future services are provided to the people of Bristol.

The decision making context was inherently complex with many stakeholders, a wide array of potential options and multiple objectives. To make the required decisions effectively, it was essential that BCC could consistently identify, compare and evaluate the available options. Recognising the effective way in which Catalyze has previously worked with local councils, the Strategic Leadership Team engaged Catalyze to support the Neighbourhoods and City Development directorate in their budget prioritisation challenges.

How we helped

A [Strategic Portfolio Management](#) process was designed and implemented to review the BCC Neighbourhoods and City Development budgets for 2012-2015 and prioritise potential savings. The process included review meetings, a [Decision Conference](#) and Multi-Criteria Decision Analysis ([MCDA](#)) modelling.

At the start of the process Service Directors and Managers within Neighbourhoods and City Development were helped to explore, agree and articulate what they saw as important to the organisation. The resulting vision was closely aligned to Bristol's '[20:20 Plan](#)' - a strategic plan to make Bristol one of Europe's top 20 cities by 2020.

The underlying brief was that all non-mandatory services should be presented for discussion, and both the short-term and future state of services should be considered. The team were challenged to think about the way their services are provided, answering important strategic questions, such as 'How can we change what we offer?' and 'Could we work with others to provide our service more efficiently?'. The team were then tasked with creating, and provisionally costing, high level business cases for budget savings.

The initial business cases were discussed at a review meeting to identify both quick-wins and those which needed to be redefined. The Strategic Portfolio Management process ensured that each option was considered in an open and consistent way. Following this meeting, the team were able to update their business cases and provide more detailed costing in preparation for the Decision Conference.

The Decision Conference provided a challenging but inclusive environment in which the team explained and discussed the nature and likely impact of each potential saving option. These business cases were then assessed based on five key criteria which linked directly to Bristol's '20:20 Plan'. This approach allowed participants to emphasise key service objectives, such as ensuring Bristol remains an attractive place to do business and reducing social and employment inequalities. The outputs of the Decision Conference, which included a prioritised list of saving options based on an MCDA model, were then presented to the Strategic Leadership Team for their final review.

Outcome

- A portfolio of £12m of budget savings within Neighbourhoods and City Development, which have a minimal impact on frontline services, was agreed by the Strategic Leadership Team.
- The inclusive and open nature of the process facilitated a shared understanding of the proposed savings and the implications for service outputs.
- Detailed discussion and review of costs ensured the proposed savings could be accurately mapped to budget lines, providing confidence in the plans and facilitating important conversations with elected members.
- A change of approach was developed, replacing 'salami-slicing' cuts with a process which protects service areas already delivering good value for money for the people of Bristol.

Graham Sims, Strategic Director for Neighbourhoods and City Development, said:

"The Catalyze approach has helped us to deal professionally and transparently with a major budget challenge. We have been able to identify savings in an inclusive and collaborative manner, and then link these savings to specific budgets giving us confidence in our ability to deliver them without negative effects on services we have decided to protect."