



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

Client background

Bristol City Council (BCC) has faced the significant challenge of continuing to provide high quality frontline services whilst making unprecedented budget savings. The council is run by a Cabinet of elected councillors and a team of permanent officers, led by the Strategic Leadership Team, which is responsible for the day-to-day delivery of services to the people of Bristol. Neighbourhoods and City Development is one of five directorates within BCC and has a wide remit which includes accountability for housing, recycling and community safety.

Client challenge

In order to meet a new spending limit of £330m, BCC needed to identify further savings of £42m between 2012 and 2015. This required the 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 Catalyze 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.

We have helped Bristol City Council:

- Agree £12m of budget savings
- Protect funding for frontline services
- Avoid a salami-slicing approach to budget cuts

“The Catalyze approach has helped us identify savings in a transparent and collaborative manner, and then link these to specific budgets giving us confidence in our ability to deliver them without negative effects on services we have decided to protect.”

Graham Sims,
Strategic Director for
Neighbourhoods and City
Development

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.

Enabling Effective Decisions

Catalyze helped Bristol City Council’s Strategic Leadership Team successfully identify and agree significant budget savings:

- 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.

Tel: +44 (0) 1962 775 923
Email: info@catalyze.co.uk

www.catalyze.co.uk

At Catalyze we help organisations to achieve their objectives, by translating strategic intent into deliverable operating plans and optimised business investment portfolios. We do this by applying our expertise in strategy, with proven tools and methodologies that enable informed decision-making and establish clear organisational priorities.

Catalyze was founded in 2001 in conjunction with the London School of Economics and Political Science, and we work with major public and private sector clients on a global basis. Our processes and tools have been independently reviewed and validated by the UK Treasury and the National Audit Office.