

CITY CHALLENGE

- Interim National Evaluation?

City Challenge allocated £37.5m each over five years to 31 Urban Programme authorities to achieve self-sustaining regeneration of their designated City Challenge areas on the basis of two competitions. In the first round, 17 local authorities covering 15 areas were invited to compete for City Challenge status. They were chosen to represent the wide range of circumstances across the country and their ability to work up imaginative plans quickly. Bids were submitted by cross-sectoral Partnerships. Eleven areas were selected as Pacemakers to pilot the initiative. For Round 2, starting in April 1993, all 57 of the then Urban Programme Authorities were invited to bid. There were twenty winners out of 54 bids. City Challenge was innovative because it was competitive; it adopted a comprehensive and strategic approach; it was targeted upon specific areas, time limited, output driven and based upon partnerships.

Key Findings

- City Challenge is the most promising regeneration scheme so far attempted. There is widespread support from players across the range of sectors for most aspects of City Challenge's design. They see it as an advance on previous urban regeneration initiatives particularly because of its partnership base, community and private sector involvement, strategic and targeted approach and its implementation by dedicated, multi-disciplinary teams.
- In the period of the study, City Challenge nationally more than met its leverage and output targets. Individual Partnerships varied considerably both in the level of their targets and the extent to which they met them.
- Competition has advantages as a management tool. It galvanises cross-sectoral involvement, requires commitment to future delivery, produces more positive and imaginative proposals for change. For some people, it is more problematic as a basis for allocating urban resources in being potentially divisive and penalising areas without conspicuous development opportunities or the capacity to deliver.
- The scale of the City Challenge resource and its areal targeting makes possible a more strategic, integrated approach to regeneration. City Challenge allows developments requiring substantial pump priming to take place. It speeds up developments which would otherwise be slower and more piecemeal. It triggers further investment and related activity. It adds value by linking separate programmes, agencies and types of expertise.
- The study found that City Challenge is influencing more widely the way in which organisations work together. It encourages cross-sectoral understanding. It stimulates more corporate working within local authorities. It leads to tighter project management. Partnership at programme and project level is bringing new alliances in other areas.

Aims and methodology

The Department of the Environment commissioned this interim national evaluation of City Challenge in 1993. The Study's main aims were to:

- provide practical results which could inform continuing implementation;
- assess the specific elements which distinguished the initiative as a national strategy for urban regeneration.

The research methodology combined quantitative and qualitative data:

- baseline data for all 31 City Challenges;
- expenditure and output for all 31 City Challenges for years 1-3 for the Pacemakers and 1-2 for Round 2s;
- case studies in 14 City Challenge areas;
- a postal survey of key partners in all 31 City Challenges;
- case studies of 2 areas which bid for but failed to win City Challenge status.

A national framework

City Challenge is a national initiative implemented in different local circumstances. Its aim is to bring sustainable and integrated regeneration to areas of widespread and multiple deprivation. It is intended to be different in terms of its values, organisation and priorities; in the scope of the regeneration sought and in the way in which it is delivered.

It emphasises not just physical regeneration but improving economic and social infrastructure and local quality of life. All the areas have the needs associated with Urban Programme authorities. Bids had to demonstrate the opportunities and strategies to tackle severe problems on a significant scale. They had to define the intended beneficiaries.

All City Challenges had the same timescale with the same level of grant allocated in equal annual instalments. The five year period was good for demonstrating commitment. But a longer lead-in time would have been helpful for more effective consultation, planning and partnership development