



Tracing the impacts of public dialogue projects supported by Sciencewise:

Disposal of radioactive waste

March 2016

Disposal of Radioactive Waste

Key facts

Date

May 2013 - February 2014 (10 months)

Costs

- Total cost of project: £440,600
- Sciencewise funding: £167,440

Commissioned by

Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC)

Delivery

Ipsos MORI (public); 3KQ Ltd (stakeholders)

Evaluation

Icarus Collective Ltd

Sciencewise Dialogue and Engagement Specialist (DES)

Steve Robinson

Introduction

This public dialogue project ran in parallel with a formal consultation that DECC ran from September to December 2013 as part of a review of the process to select a site for the geological disposal of higher activity radioactive waste. The dialogue project overall included two-day workshops in four locations with public participants, and seven one-day workshops with stakeholders; events took place in November and December 2013. The process was designed to inform the White Paper - *Implementing Geological Disposal*¹, published in July 2014.

The dialogue project in summary

The Government's policy for the long-term management of the UK's higher activity radioactive waste is geological disposal. In 2008, a White Paper set out the Government's preferred approach to site selection for a Geological Disposal Facility (GDF), based on the principles of voluntarism and working in partnership with willing communities. Three local authorities expressed an interest in exploring the opportunity to host a GDF. However, in January 2013, the decision was taken not to proceed any further with this site selection process.

The Government sought to reflect on this process to see what lessons could be learned and established a review. A call for evidence in May/June 2013 and meetings with stakeholders invited views which fed into the development of an open consultation that ran between 12 September and 5 December 2013. The consultation focused on the proposed changes to the siting process for a GDF for the long-term management of the UK's higher activity radioactive waste.

A dialogue project ran in parallel with the consultation, with dialogue events in November and December 2013. The purpose of the dialogue project was to:

- inform Government decision-making through a better understanding of public and stakeholder views on the proposed changes to the site selection process and
- offer information that would support participants to make submissions to the public consultation.

The project was commissioned by DECC, with support from the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA – a non-departmental public body).

The main elements of the dialogue project were:

- DECC convened a small Stakeholder Reference Group (SRG) that met throughout the process and included three external organisations representing sectoral stakeholder groups – non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the nuclear industry (the Nuclear Industry Association) and local authorities (Nuclear Legacy Advisory Forum – NuLEAF). The SRG advised on the provision of balanced and objective information to dialogue events, the participants to be invited and the reporting of the events. The SRG produced their own short report on the process, which was published as an Annex to the independent project evaluation report².
- The public workshops each ran twice for a full day on consecutive Saturdays in November and December 2013. The workshops were held at four different locations - Nottingham, Bridgwater, London and Penrith. The locations were chosen to include different types of communities (urban, rural etc), including two in close proximity to nuclear power stations. Participants completed a homework task between the two events. A total of 63 public participants were involved, recruited to ensure a broad mix of local residents.

¹ DECC (2014) *Implementing Geological Disposal - A Framework for the long-term management of higher activity radioactive waste*. July 2014. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/implementing-geological-disposal>

² Icarus (2015) *Evaluation of the engagement events during the geological disposal facility siting review consultation*. January 2015. <http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk/cms/assets/Uploads/GDF-evaluation-report-final.pdf>

- National stakeholder workshops were run for one day each in November 2013 in four locations - Penrith, Llandudno, Exeter and London, with a total of 96 participants. In addition, three sector-specific events were held in November 2013 in Warrington (industry) and London (local authorities and NGOs) with a total of 66 participants.

The results³ from the public dialogue workshops identified five key principles that appeared to underpin public participants' opinions of the revised GDF siting process:

- **Awareness and education.** This was a key requirement for nearly all public participants. Workshop participants felt they initially knew very little (if anything) about radioactive waste and the agreed policy of managing it. They felt that if voluntarism was to succeed, then the wider public needed to understand the challenges of managing radioactive waste and what the impact of a GDF might be for a community.
- **Transparency and openness.** Participants felt it was important that Government was open and transparent about the need for a GDF, including what the potential risks could be from implementing it (or not). They wanted the siting process to be run in a similar vein, with community representatives sharing the information on the potential impacts of a GDF and taking any decisions in the open.
- **Local.** Participants referred back to the importance of ensuring the views of the 'local community' and 'local people' were heard, even though they generally struggled to define 'community' in relation to a GDF.
- **Fairness.** The participants frequently spoke of fairness. For most, this meant ensuring that the process represented and involved everybody in the community. It was generally felt that the process should hear the views of those who opposed a GDF as well as those who supported the facility. Fairness also meant that the information that was presented to the community and its representatives needed to be balanced and impartial.
- **Efficiency.** There was a clear call from participants for the process to be run as efficiently as possible. They were keen to find efficiencies that could lead to cost savings. In particular, this principle underpinned responses around the calls for screening and targeting resources on specific communities (if possible), and queries around the timeline.

Dissemination of dialogue results

- The report of the public dialogue workshops⁴, the stakeholder⁵ and sector⁶ workshops, and the evaluation report⁷ were published by DECC on the DECC and Sciencewise websites in February 2014.
- The dialogue results and experience of the dialogue project were shared with DECC's Customer Insight Team and were identified as having value beyond the GDF work, with the expectation that the project would improve communications across other aspects of DECC's work.
- The company appointed as the developer of the GDF site selection process (Radioactive Waste Management Limited) started a programme of consumer research with the goal of exploring public perceptions of the UK's nuclear history. This research was planned to form part of the backstory within future communications within the process, and echoed the importance placed on good communications within the analysis of the consultation and dialogue process evidence.

Impacts on policy

- **July 2014.** The Government published its formal response to the open consultation⁸. DECC considered the results of the dialogue project as complementary evidence to the formal responses to the open consultation, and referred to the *"15 engagement events during November and December 2013 at locations across England and Wales. These events included deliberative workshops with a representative spread of members of the public. ... the feedback received during the events complemented the consultation"* (page 3). The response document goes on to say *"Government has considered and reflected key themes raised at the events as it developed this revised White Paper. Some of the recurring themes were: the importance of providing more information at an early stage to communities; the inherent difficulty in deciding who represents a community but the need to be more certain about it; and a need to be clear about community investment and how it will be defined and administered."*

³ Text on key findings from Sciencewise case study: <http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk/cms/assets/Uploads/CS-Disp-radioact-waste04.pdf>

⁴ <http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk/cms/assets/Uploads/Public-workshop-final-report.pdf>

⁵ <http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk/cms/assets/Uploads/GDF-National-Stakeholder-Workshop-Report-FINAL2.pdf>

⁶ <http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk/cms/assets/Uploads/GDF-siting-review-consultation-sector-events-report-final2.pdf>

⁷ <http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk/cms/assets/Uploads/GDF-evaluation-report-final.pdf>

⁸ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/332886/Government_response_to_GDF_siting_consultation_FINAL.pdf

- **July 2014.** The White Paper, *Implementing Geological Disposal*⁹ was published alongside the formal response to the consultation.

The independent evaluation of the dialogue analysed the extent to which the White Paper covered the issues that had been raised in the public dialogue workshops and covered in the final dialogue report (by Ipsos MORI). The evaluation concluded that the public dialogue work had contributed to the development of the White Paper in three ways¹⁰ - the content of the White Paper, plans for future engagement within the GDF siting process, and the style of the White Paper, as follows.

- **The content of the White Paper.** Dialogue results on continuing conversations with communities, governance and determining community benefits were all explicitly covered in the White Paper.

Key findings of the dialogue workshops	Reported in public dialogue results	Considered by White Paper?
Low public awareness of radioactive waste management and geological disposal	✓	Section 4.1 - 4.6
Need for awareness and education for the wider public through clear and accessible information	✓	Section 4.1 - 4.6
Affirmation of voluntarism	✓	Section 4.1
Challenging to define 'community'	✓	Choice of two year period to prepare for work with communities (see below)
Challenging to identify form of governance to manage GDF	✓	Choice of two year period to prepare for work with communities
Affirmation of test of community support and right of withdrawal	✓	Section 7.20 - 7.21
Affirmation of need for community benefits package, though challenging to define content	✓	Section 7.13 - 7.23
Need for transparent and open process	✓	Section 4.3
Desire for efficiency	✓	Section 3.18 - 3.20
Desire for fairness	✓	Section 4.3

The evaluation report identifies DECC evidence that the choice within the White Paper to take a period in which to prepare to work with communities was a consequence of the experience of taking part in the dialogue workshops as well as a response to the formal responses to the open consultation. The evaluation also reports DECC stating that the dialogue workshops were important in underlining the importance of the new siting process being an ongoing conversation between Government and citizens.

This led to the choice set out within the White Paper not to attempt to find immediate, specific answers to some of the most challenging aspects of the process (e.g. defining 'community', setting out governance arrangements, determining community benefits / investments) but to continue the conversations begun by the dialogue workshops over the coming two years. One member of the SRG for the dialogue described this influence as "*profound*", suggesting that the approach to decision making set out in the White Paper was "*fundamentally different*" to that described in the consultation document.

⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/implementing-geological-disposal>

¹⁰ Evidence on impacts from independent evaluation report on the project, published by DECC and Sciencewise January 2015; the report included the view from public participants that the White Paper reflected what was said at the public workshops

The White Paper also took further the need to focus on the nature of 'communities', proposing a Community Representation Working Group whose responsibilities were to include:

- developing approaches to defining 'communities'
 - * defining roles and responsibilities for community representatives
 - * developing options for ensuring all levels of local government have a voice
 - * developing clarity around the timing of a test of public support for a GDF
 - * developing options for the disbursement of community investment (referred to as 'benefits' in the consultation document)
- **Future consultation and engagement activity within the GDF siting process.** DECC decided to use dialogue within the new site selection process as a result of learning through this project about the value of dialogue in creating constructive engagement (see below for recent developments reflecting this).

In addition, the evaluation identifies "*indications that some NGO participants have begun to re-think their approach to engagement with Government, and are considering a more collaborative working relationship.*" (evaluation report page 10). More specifically, the evaluation report identifies that stakeholder "*participants noted a desire to work more collaboratively with Government. A shift from defending positions to move to a more open and collaborative approach where common interests and needs are explored was proposed. This may require a shift in the level of engagement from consultation to a more collaborative approach, where the wide range of experience of both Government and NGOs could be pooled with a view to achieving the best outcome.*" (evaluation report page 27).

- **The style of the White Paper.** DECC's new confidence in talking to the public after the dialogue workshops also resulted in the White Paper being produced to be easily understandable and accessible to lay people in terms of language, layout and illustration. The dialogue evaluation report states that DECC realised "*that we can talk to people about this in a way that is understandable, and that people can contribute once they have that understanding*", which prompted the consideration, when drafting the White Paper, not just of the messages to be conveyed, but *how* they were to be communicated. This led to the White Paper being drafted to be not overly reliant on text, but to be visually appealing and to offer info-graphics to interpret the narrative, and to be capable of 'standing alone' without the need for recourse to lengthy scientific reference texts. This influence has been confirmed more recently: "*the language in the White Paper was drafted in a way that reflected what we heard in the public dialogue meetings.*" (DECC 2016)
- **25 February 2015.** The Grand Committee of the House of Lords considered the Infrastructure Planning (Radioactive Waste Geological Disposal Facilities) Order 2015¹¹. Baroness Verma, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for DECC said (Hansard col GC360):

"When I looked at the process, it was particularly to see how we could better engage with the public and other stakeholders, beyond the elected members. I agree that the role of the elected members is really important but the debate has to reach much further. Those communities that will ultimately be involved must be assured that they have the final say ...

"... the consultation has made it clear that the detailed process of how community representation operates from 2016 will set out that all stakeholders, including elected members, will be a part of the process. They will be able to feed in and be involved in looking at the processes before any formal discussions take place"

These statements reflect the results of the public dialogue, as summarised in the final dialogue report. That report identified public discomfort with the idea that the decision making body on the Geological Disposal Facility (GDF) would be the local council alone (dialogue report page 12); most saw a role for community representatives drawn from the local community. The dialogue report stressed that "*In all discussions participants referred back to the importance of ensuring the views of the 'local community' and 'local people' were heard*" (page 14).

- **July 2015.** DECC launched a Call for Evidence¹² '*Implementing geological disposal: Working with communities*', following on from the publication in July 2014 of the White Paper. The aim of the Call was to draw together evidence and information on processes for working with communities in the siting of a Geological Disposal Facility (GDF). In particular, the Call asked questions on how to define a community; how to provide effective representation, governance and decision making; how to manage and disburse Community Investment; and how to deliver public support. It focused on the work of the Community Representation Working Group (CRWG), set up under the White Paper.

¹¹ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201415/ldhansrd/text/150225-gc0001.htm>

¹² https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/440014/Call_for_evidence__FINAL.pdf

Although the Call did not specifically identify the dialogue project as background, it did refer to the 'consultation' in 2013. As shown above, DECC considered the dialogue a part of the overall consultation and took the evidence from the dialogue project alongside the consultation responses in developing the White Paper.

The issues in this Call, based on the content of the White Paper which had drawn on the dialogue results, included affirmation of the principle of voluntarism, the challenge of defining 'community', the challenge of finding the right forms of governance to manage a GDF, the need for a transparent and open process throughout, affirmation of the need for tests of community support and right of withdrawal, and of the need for a community benefits package.

Of additional note in considering the influence of the dialogue on the CRWG are:

- Professor Andy Blowers was one of the three external stakeholders on the Stakeholder Reference Group (SRG) for the dialogue project; he became a member of the CRWG.
- The independent evaluation report on the dialogue shows that the dialogue process led to the choice, set out in the White Paper, to take a two year period to prepare to work with communities (as described above). The Call in 2015 was part of that continuing work by DECC to deal with the most challenging aspects of the process - defining 'community', setting out governance arrangements, determining community benefits / investments.
- **October 2015.** Follow-up research by Sciencewise to examine how public input fits into the policy making process, found that one DECC policy maker reported that "*We actually changed 2/3 of our policy and the White Paper based on what we heard*" in the dialogue.
- **October 2015.** DECC began a new dialogue project (again with Sciencewise support)¹³ to inform the Community Representation Working Group (CRWG – see above) Stakeholder Engagement Plan for Implementing Geological Disposal – Working with Communities. The CRWG was established to implement one of the three initial actions set out in the White Paper: these three actions were to carry out national geological screening, establish a policy framework for planning decisions in England and develop a process for working with communities.

The specification for the new DECC dialogue outlined the process to be undertaken: 10 stakeholder and public dialogue workshops to be run between November 2015 and March 2016 to allow stakeholders and members of the public to learn about and test the developing options for working with communities, so that the views and ideas of the participants could feed into the further GDF policy development on community representation, community investment and the appropriate test of public support. All these issues, and the approach to consultation, were identified as priorities in the original dialogue project.

The public dialogue workshops were run in January 2016, and the stakeholder workshops in March 2016. The results are intended to feed into the work of the CRWG, to inform their final report in April 2016 on their consolidated policy advice, which would in turn form the basis of Government policy later in 2016.

- **26 January 2016.** DECC published a summary of the responses to the Call for Evidence (above): Implementing Geological Disposal: Working with Communities¹⁴. The Call was open from 1 July to 4 September 2015, during which time 54 responses were submitted. The DECC response report identified next steps as follows;

"The responses described in this report focus on the following key areas: defining the community, community representation, governance and decision making, community investment and the test of public support. The responses to the call for evidence will be considered by DECC during the next stage of policy development on community representation. The CRWG is providing support and advice to DECC during the policy development process. It is important to note that the call for evidence was not a formal public consultation. It was intended as an opportunity to feed in evidence to the development of proposals. A formal consultation may be held in summer 2016, if necessary."

- **March 2016.** DECC confirmed again that the dialogue results fed directly into the development of the White Paper and subsequent delivery of the White Paper programme:

"The dialogue was used in the development of policy for a White Paper, but where we may see it as useful in the future is if we use the tools to engage effectively with communities ... it definitely impacted our development of the White Paper ... it was about making robust policy ... and it is a lot to do with our long term delivery of the programme ... we're keen to get those kinds of tools involved with the actual implementation of policy on the ground when we start to talk to communities." (DECC 2016)

¹³ <http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk/cms/implementing-geological-disposal-working-with-communities/>

¹⁴ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/505339/2016_02_11_Call_for_Evidence_Summary_Report.pdf

"It's an ability to talk to people that don't know about the policy to test it, to make sure it is robust with audiences that can provide new ideas and have a different perspective to usual stakeholders ... we have used it to make sure that the policy was as robust as possible and that we have a better chance of successful delivery of the actual project on the ground, that we are listening openly to concerns of stakeholders and the public and responding to those through a dialogue or collaborative process rather than the old school 'decide, announce, defend' way of delivering the project." (DECC 2016)

DECC have increasingly seen public dialogue as supporting the delivery of robust policy:

"It is about robust policy, it's about understanding who you are talking to and getting out of the Whitehall bubble. It is about making policies that are actually going to be useful to people or be deliverable on the ground, to ensure better value for money so you are not rolling out things that are not fit for purpose. It's about enabling the ability to communicate with the public in a much more beneficial way. It's about a collaborative approach to delivering policy as opposed to a top down effect. It's all about making sure the policy of consent-based siting is robust and will deliver." (DECC 2016)

Impacts on DECC internally

- **Changed DECC views of engagement.** The report of the independent evaluation of the dialogue project took the view that *"Arguably the strongest influence from the process has been among DECC personnel. Feedback from the DECC staff involved and from other partners in the process suggests that involvement in the project has helped the Geological Disposal Team to ... think that meaningful public dialogue can be undertaken on controversial issues and that the team is able to play an integral role within the dialogue. As a member of the SRG noted, this is highly significant in the context of the White Paper and the commitment to voluntarism."*

At that time, DECC themselves identified a 'change of spirit', indicating that the dialogue process had given them the opportunity to talk with members of the public they would not ordinarily encounter. The team suggested this was significant in offering a contrast to the tone and character of the conversations more commonly held with established stakeholders to the radioactive waste management debate, which could be challenging and conflictual.

The DECC team also suggested that the importance of this was that, had the conversations with the public not taken place, it was possible the new policy would have been driven by the usual dynamic of challenge and conflict. The dialogue with members of the public, the team suggested, had helped to shift the attitude of the team to one that was more optimistic and outward looking.

These changes were confirmed through follow-up research in March 2016. DECC confirmed that one of the main insights from the original public dialogue project was understanding the potential of talking directly with members of the public:

"It was an understanding that we can have these conversations with the public. We had a view that it was quite complicated and difficult to have a conversation but actually it was quite clear when we were in the meetings with them that they could grasp quite complicated things very quickly and get to grips with the policy quite quickly ... we don't usually get an opportunity to talk to people beyond our usual suspects so using those tools to talk to members of the public, to hear the views from the person on the ground who doesn't know about this or hasn't got previous experience of it is very helpful in testing the developing policy." (DECC 2016)

- **Supported open policy making in DECC.** DECC has explicitly used public dialogue as an approach to open policy making to inform policy development at an early stage:

"We have tried to develop it into our open policy making so instead of just using it when you have a policy and you're consulting on that policy, we wanted to do it as part of the actual policy development itself, before we conclude the policy. I think that would be the main development." (DECC 2016)

DECC has also developed the initial dialogue project into a case study that has been used to support open policy making more generally across the department and more widely:

"Our case study has been used as part of the open policy-making training that has been going on in DECC, so that's been rolled out to the rest of the organisation. Other teams are using our case study to learn more about public dialogue and how it can be used in other areas. So in that respect it is influencing DECC's ability to do open policy making in this way ... it is influencing the whole organisation about how you can use these tools in policy-making."

- **Developing robust policy in future.** DECC use dialogue as part of robust policy making and recognise the importance of maintaining the credibility of the process if that is to be continued:

“To make public dialogue even more credible we need to ensure that people understand the benefit of it, and that organisations like Sciencewise need to be communicating that to a senior level so that it is not seen as an add-on but seen as a core component of having a robust policy, particularly with the delivery of all these huge pieces of infrastructure that we are trying to deliver over the next few decades. In terms of robustness it is one of the more robust things that we do in terms of using the rules that Sciencewise has in place for public dialogue projects - so the independent evaluation, the independent oversight group, the process by which we bid for funding in the first place, the Sciencewise rules that we have to make sure that we’ve adhered to. There is a lot of rigour involved in it, which I think is very useful ... You need an organisation to help policy makers to do this as it is not something that we do every single day, we use it as we need it for policy development or consultation. So a lot of it depends on the support that we’ve got behind us to help us ensure that it is credible and robust.” (DECC 2016)

- **Supported DECC’s international role.** The dialogue project has been of interest internationally. Aspects of the approach to collaborative working in this project were also discussed at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Review Group on international guidance in Vienna in March 2016. DECC also confirmed:

“We get contacted by quite a few people about our work. We have had international interest from Japan, interest from Chile and also from China about dialogue because of this work. Either through other colleagues in DECC or elsewhere, it is having far reaching consequences that way as well.” (DECC 2016)

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Sciencewise Evaluation Manager
29 March 2016