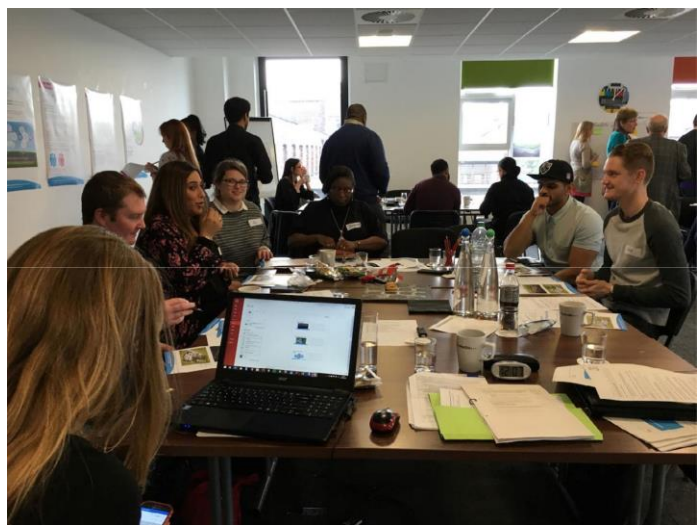


## Case Study: Geological Disposal and working with communities

From December 2015 to March 2016, the Department for Energy and Climate Change (DECC) ran a second Sciencewise-supported dialogue to explore public views on the siting of a Geological Disposal Facility (GDF). By exploring not just public opinions but the underlying reasons for them, this dialogue provided the GDF Policy Team with valuable evidence to inform policy-making.

### 1. Background

A GDF is a site which aims to provide a permanent solution to the legacy of higher-activity waste that has been accumulating in the UK since the 1940s<sup>1</sup>. The 2015-16 dialogue took place in the context of a 2014 White Paper 'Implementing Geological Disposal'<sup>2</sup> which set out government preferences for siting of a GDF which was heavily informed by a 2013 Sciencewise supported dialogue, Managing Radioactive Waste Safely Siting Process Review<sup>3</sup> which explored how best to engage the public on this issue. The overarching aim of the White Paper was to create policy in an open, inclusive and transparent manner. The success of the previous dialogue led to DECC taking a new approach to policy making. This approach included taking time to engage with communities and *"treating the development of a new siting process as an 'ongoing conversation between Government and citizens' and setting up a Community Representation Working Group (CRWG)."*<sup>4</sup>



3KQ. 2016 Public dialogue on geological disposal and working with communities. pg15.

The aim of the dialogue was to understand public attitudes on how a site for a GDF should be chosen. It explored public views on options for Community Representation (CR), Community Investment (CI) and Test of Public Support (TOPS) which could be used to develop policy on siting a GDF. The outputs from the dialogue provided a solid foundation on which to take policy forward on this challenging issue.

The dialogue involved two workshops with 54 members of the public, selected as representatives of the urban, rural and semi-rural populations around Swindon and

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/geological-disposal-facility-gdf-for-high-activity-radioactive-waste>

<sup>2</sup> Department of Energy and Climate Change. 2014. Implementing Geological Disposal. Available from: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/332890/GDF\\_White\\_Paper\\_FINAL.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/332890/GDF_White_Paper_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <https://sciencewise.org.uk/projects/review-of-the-managing-radioactive-waste-safely-mrws-siting-process/?portfolioCats=11%2C10%2C13%2C14%2C12%2C15>

<sup>4</sup> Ursus. 2016. Evaluation of Public Dialogue on Community Involvement in Siting a Geological Disposal Facility. Pg2.

Manchester. Participants had no previous experience, positive or negative, of nuclear waste disposal issues and were recruited to include a mix of educational levels, genders, social groups and ethnicities.<sup>5</sup>

## 2. Impact

This dialogue formed part of a broader evidence base on which DECC could draw, alongside the CRWG and stakeholder consultation. Although this dialogue was not required by the White Paper, its success led DECC to recognise the value of the insight and perspectives gained through the project.<sup>6</sup> The independent evaluation of the dialogue found that public participants were unanimously satisfied with the events they had attended. This dialogue has also had long term impact as the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) published the guidance paper ‘Implementing Geological Disposal – Working with Communities’ in 2018 which stated it was informed by this public dialogue<sup>7</sup>. Policy-makers involved in the dialogue also planned to share their learning with other departments including the Cabinet Office and at the OECD’s Forum for Stakeholder Confidence and at the International Atomic Energy Agency.<sup>8</sup>



3KQ. 2016 Public dialogue on geological disposal and working with communities. pg.20.

The GDF 2015-16 dialogue demonstrated the value that engaging with the public adds to a policy development process. It provided fresh perspectives and allowed DECC to sense check their proposals with the public and gather valuable evidence to feed into policymaking. The Sciencewise support was regarded by policy makers as crucial in running a quality dialogue process. This engaged people at the right level and enabled them to effectively contribute upstream in the policy process. In the project evaluation policy interviewees *“highlighted that dialogue-savvy individuals will move around within government and that they would have challenges in carrying out future public dialogues in the absence of Sciencewise support (funding, rigour and best practice advice).”*<sup>9</sup>

## 3. Vital Statistics

Commissioning body	Department for Energy and Climate Change
Duration of process	4 months, December 2015 – March 2016
Number of participants	54 public participants
Cost of project	£87,380 total. £38,000 from Sciencewise, the balance from DECC
Dialogue contractor	3KQ
Evaluation contractor	URSUS Consulting Ltd

<sup>5</sup> 3KQ. 2016. Public dialogue on geological disposal and working with communities. Pg4

<sup>6</sup> Ursus. 2016. Pg28.

<sup>7</sup> Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. 2018. Implementing Geological Disposal – Working with Communities. pg.39 Accessed: 13/03/2019. Available from: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/>

<sup>8</sup> Ursus. 2016. Pgiii.

<sup>9</sup> Ursus. 2016. Pg29.