



WEST OF ENGLAND PARTNERSHIP

Client interview Allan Davies, Planning Policy Officer, North Somerset Council and the West of England Partnership Office

The four councils of Bath and North East Somerset, Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire in the former Avon area are working together to produce a Joint Residual Municipal Waste Management Strategy and a Joint Waste Development Plan Document.

The big incentive to undertake the project is European Union regulations designed to reduce the use of unsustainable landfill sites, and to drastically reduce the amount of biodegradable municipal waste sent to landfill.

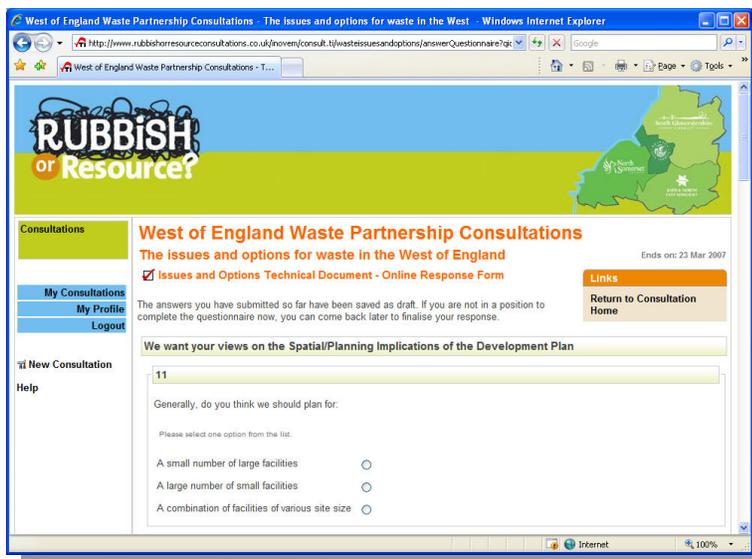
The Joint Waste Planning and Waste Management Strategy is seen as providing a practical way in which four separate waste planning and waste management authorities can find a workable way forward. By working together, there is the potential to maximise economies of scale and to share expertise while at the same time maximising future waste treatment options.

THE CHALLENGE OF DEALING WITH WASTE

In common with many parts of the country, the area is faced with the challenge of planning new ways of treating 'residual' waste. This is the real rubbish left over after waste has been minimised as much as possible from reduction, reuse and recycling.

"There are many alternatives to landfill, and some are more practical and cost-effective than others. An early challenge was to identify the realistic range of technologies currently available and to consult the public and stakeholders on the findings of an Options Appraisal", says Allan Davies.

Consultants Jacobs were appointed to provide some technical know-how, and a stakeholder group was established to help with the assessment of the best technology options. The four West of England Unitary Authorities agreed a list of seven technology options for consultation.



“At an early stage it was realised that an important part of the consultation strategy was a web-presence. A dedicated website was established – www.rubbishorresource.co.uk – and this continues to provide the main ‘virtual’ presence for the waste strategy”, says Davies.

“Engagement with the public and stakeholders was complicated by the fact that a consultation strategy had to integrate the consultation and communication needs of two separate strategies – a joint waste management strategy and a joint waste planning strategy. But presenting the public and stakeholders with the bigger waste picture makes sense.”

A combined consultation also provided the opportunity to explore the links between waste planning and waste management.

WHY DID WEST OF ENGLAND PARTNERSHIP CHOOSE INOVEM?

“In a way INOVEM chose itself”, says Allan Davies. “Partnership working provides the opportunity to share resources and expertise, and because a number of the partner authorities had recently chosen INOVEM, it was felt that the consultation on the issues and options for waste in the West of England was a good excuse to ‘road test’ INOVEM’s eConsultation software as part of our engagement strategy.

“We were looking for a system that was web-based but also provided the public and stakeholders with access to information and reports and an easy-to-use on-line response form.”

INNOVATING IN STAKEHOLDER E-CONSULTATION

A partner authority, South Gloucestershire Council is providing the support for the INOVEM on-line consultation. This includes analysis of the responses.



“One novel approach in the use of on-line consultation has been the use of a discussion forum, including ‘live’ discussion sessions. We are still at the stage of assessing the use of on-line forums, but in the future this may provide a good basis for providing the public and stakeholders with an opportunity to develop their thinking on issues and options. This would in turn inform the subsequent stages of the planning process.

“Much will depend upon the willingness of consultees to commit themselves to sharing their views on-line. Perhaps in the future there may be scope for linking on-line views with evidence and source documents provided by respondents themselves.”

“Partnership working provides the opportunity to share resources and expertise ...”

RESULTS TO DATE

Consultation on the issues and options for waste in the West of England has now come to an end.

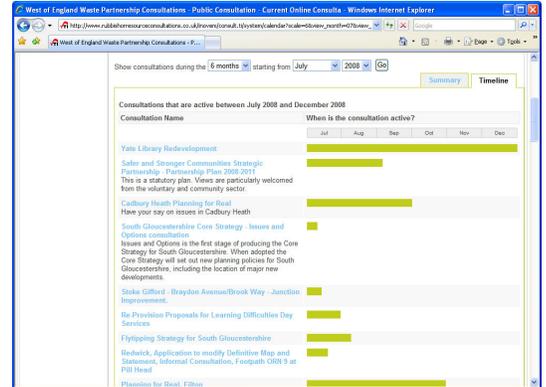
“Over 60% of the responses were received via the online consultation and we are at the stage of analysing the response to the issues and options raised. It is anticipated that a report on the consultation, including reports on more traditional consultation events such as public meetings and stakeholder workshops, will be available on the website during July 2007.

“While INOVEM provides the essential tools for the job, it is important not to underestimate the time it takes to summarise the main points made by respondents. Without synthesis it is difficult to see the ‘wood from the trees’ and the main messages that inform future action are lost.

WHERE NEXT?

“The next stage is for the partner authorities to consider the responses to the consultation and to agree the final version of the Joint Residual Municipal Waste Management Strategy during the Autumn. INOVEM’s eConsultation service made it a lot easier for the partnership to gather views and provide a structured approach to public response.”

Decisions made on the waste strategy will inform the next stages of the waste planning strategy. Consultation on ‘preferred options’ is scheduled to take place early in the New Year.



“Again, a consultation and communications strategy will be prepared to shape the way in which the partner authorities, and no doubt INOVEM will again play an important part.”

“INOVEM’s eConsultation service made it a lot easier for the partnership to gather views and provide a structured approach to public response.”

LET’S GET TOGETHER

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