The Environment Agency is responsible for protecting and improving the environment. It’s the largest environmental organisation in England and Wales and employs around 11,400 people in seven regional offices. It plays a central role in delivering the environmental priorities of the UK government and the Welsh Government.

The Environment Agency has three main roles which are environmental regulator to help improve environmental standards and minimise unnecessary burden on businesses; environmental operator working with people and communities in an integrated way; and environmental adviser and champion for the environment.

“Creating a better place” is the latest corporate strategy, covering the five year period 2010 to 2015 and focusing on five key areas. Alongside acting to reduce climate change and its consequences, protecting and improving water, land and air, and being the best that they can, two of the agency’s key areas involve working with various stakeholders to improve the environment. Specifically, its guiding strategy states that it will work with people and communities to create better places, and work with businesses and other organisations to use resources wisely.

Working with a wide variety of stakeholders is therefore vital to the success of what the Environment Agency does - without getting feedback and buy-in from interested parties, its strategies and guidance would not be effective.

Cath Beaver, Senior Stakeholder Relations Adviser at the Environment Agency, explains “A significant aspect of managing the relationships with these stakeholders is to get vital feedback from them on our plans, via the consultations we run every year.”

“We are committed to strengthening our partnership work with local communities and with local organisations such as local authorities. So it is important that we run and manage our consultations effectively to ensure that the process of consultation does not get in the way of the substance of the consultation itself,” she added.
We conduct a large number of consultations each year, so we needed a solution that could not only integrate seamlessly with our website but simplify the entire consultation process.

Cath Beaver
Senior Stakeholder Relations Adviser

Following a formal tender process, the Environment Agency selected uEngage, a comprehensive consultation platform developed by Objective Corporation. uEngage was seen as the most suitable option on the market to meet its requirements and help them in its goal to improve the consultation process.

SOLUTION AND IMPLEMENTATION
The project commenced in February 2009 with regular meetings and demonstrations with the project team and other key stakeholders. Within four months, the new consultation platform had been seamlessly integrated with the Environment Agency’s website, complete with full corporate branding.

“We were delighted to be given the opportunity to help the Environment Agency in its process of improving its consultations to meet its corporate aims,” said Simon Etherington, UK General Manager of Objective Corporation. “We always work closely with customers to ensure that our solutions meet specific requirements, and deliver tangible benefits. In the Environment Agency’s case, this meant making sure that the consultation platform became a seamless part of the corporate website, delivering dual language consultation capabilities, and reassuring the Agency that the platform is robust enough to handle the significant number of consultations that it conducts each year.”

Following extensive testing, the first consultations went live in June 2009, and from spring 2010, uEngage was rolled out across the organisation.

BUSINESS BENEFITS
Emma Hammonds, a Strategic Liaison Advisor, who advises colleagues on how to run effective consultations said: “uEngage has been vital to our development as an organisation and it has significantly improved the way we run consultations. We have benefited from enhanced response rates and it has helped us to streamline our way of working.” Emma also added: “The service
we’ve received from Objective’s support team has proved invaluable and they have been extremely responsive to our needs.”

Environment Agency consultation owners can be based either at a national, regional or local level. But regardless of their location, uEngage enables them to initiate and manage each consultation in a consistent manner. It has also enabled them to replace many of their previous procedures and the whole process of consultation, and associated reports, has been greatly simplified.

As one consultation owner highlighted “As lead in the team for making sure our guidance reviews happen, I really like the e-consultation system structure. It’s helped us make sure, as a team, we’re using the same processes so builds resilience in case someone leaves the team or is off sick. It also reaches far more people than I could ever do just with my circle of friends so that is good. We were hoping it’d help us consult more widely in an accountable manner and it certainly does that.”

Cath Beaver continues “The Environment Agency had a highly specific business need. Above all else we run so many different consultations each year that a one-size-fits-all model is not for us and not for our stakeholder community. It was therefore the degree of flexibility that uEngage gives us that was so attractive.”

“We can now set up templates for different consultations which are both intuitive and user friendly. For us one of the critical success factors was the ease of use of the solution as we didn’t want to expend enormous resources in terms of time and money being spent on training.

“The tool is bringing consistency to our consultation process. But this is an ongoing process of self-improvement. With each new consultation we are building in questions on how stakeholders find the process. This enables us to gather feedback and evaluate the investment to demonstrate tangible benefits which is a given in today’s economic climate.”
Managing our consultations to a high standard ultimately leads to us having the ability to make better decisions, based on a wider range of views, and helps us to achieve our corporate aims.

Cath Beaver
Senior Stakeholder Relations Adviser

Further improvements to the Environment Agency’s consultee experience have been achieved through:

- a consistent approach across the entire organisation
- better presented information in a centralised system that enables consultees to find and access information easier
- enhanced brand reputation as the consultation platform is seamlessly integrated with the Environment Agency website
- improved decision making capability
- full inclusion of all stakeholders through bi-lingual capabilities.

Cath Beaver concludes: “This improved consultee experience, in particular, has been very important. Consultees have benefited from being able to access information that is better presented, easier to find, and consistent across the agency. They can be automatically notified of new consultations affecting their areas of interest and encouraged to participate.”

“Managing our consultations to a high standard ultimately leads to us having the ability to make better decisions, based on a wider range of views, and helps us to achieve our corporate aims.”

ABOUT OBJECTIVE CORPORATION
Objective Corporation (ASX:OCL) is an established leader and specialist provider of proven content, collaboration and process management solutions for the public sector.

Our solutions empower public sector effectiveness, efficiency and transparency, helping governments deliver better services at a lower cost to the community.

Through direct customer engagement, Objective is committed to delivering outcomes that have a positive effect on the public sector, its citizens and the community.

Since 1987, we have been trusted by Government and Top 1000 corporations to deliver long-term valued business outcomes.

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