

NUCLEAR ISSUES

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Councillor Elaine Woodburn -
LEAD OFFICER and John Groves – Head of Nuclear, Energy and Planning
REPORT AUTHOR:

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Council delegates the Leader and Chief Executive to continue dialogue with relevant ministers and government departments and other stakeholders over the long term provisions for the handling and storage of legacy waste and potential new waste streams. Discussion should have particular regard to the willingness of Copeland to continue to be party to appropriate investigations and discussions relating to the need for a long term disposal solution to higher activity nuclear wastes.; the scale and nature of waste which is already stored in West Cumbria and the need to continue to ensure that the area secures maximum social and economic benefit from its historic and developing relationships with the energy sector and the nuclear industry.

That a clear reporting process should be agreed through the Executive and to Council in order to ensure all members are kept informed and to support consideration of the need for wider consultation and community engagement.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 It will have been quite difficult to avoid awareness of the debate and outcomes from the decisions of the Council, the County Council and Allerdale Borough Council on 30 January. The formal process of MRWS was halted by the decision of the County Council not to proceed to stage 4 and to commence further desk top investigation into the suitability of the geology in West Cumbria to potentially host a GDF.

1.2 It is clear that the present MRWS process in West Cumbria is ended due to the decision taken by Cumbria County Council. It would not necessarily prevent another potential host community coming forward. Ministers have stated their intention to encourage dialogue with other potential host communities. Copeland has made a clear, rational and supported decision to move into the next stage of the process. The decision was credible and reflected the conclusions of the MRWS

partnership, and the processes set out through those conclusions. The decision properly reflected the benefits of continuing to the next stage of the process, whilst seeking assurances from Government that a range of other matters would remain open for debate in later stages, that there would be a number of further stages for stakeholder and community engagements and that the right of withdrawal continues to be enshrined in the process.

1.3 The end of the MRWS process leaves a vacuum. There remain a number of matters which must be considered in terms of the future social and economic wellbeing for the residents and business within Copeland. This report seeks to facilitate discussion and agreement over continuation of dialogue with all relevant parties relating to the long term management of radioactive waste and the wider implications for the energy and nuclear sectors.

2. ISSUES

2.1 Legacy Waste

It is estimated that 70% of the waste which would be stored in a national waste repository is currently located at Sellafield. It is useful to reflect on the description used in the recent published report of the House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts

“Sellafield ishome to an extraordinary accumulation of hazardous waste, much of it stored in outdated nuclear facilities”

It is clearly vital for the Council to engage in discussion at all levels to ensure that proper consideration is being given to the long term effectiveness of proposals relating to the storage of these materials. Such discussions are not unrelated to the wider decommissioning of the Sellafield site. Proposals to deal with waste nationally are being made in a context where the Public Accounts Committee has recognised the linkages between high levels of public expenditure and the opportunities to secure economic and social benefits in an area of high need and deprivation.

2.2 A Centre of Excellence

The recognition of the West Cumbrian coast as Britain’s Energy Coast reflects the long established relationship with the Nuclear Industry and the highly developed skills base which already exists within the community. There are clear linkages between the maintenance and development of the internationally recognised credentials of the nuclear sector in West Cumbria and the potential of the area to continue to play a role in the management of radioactive waste. Continued dialogue is essential to ensure that the Council continues to have influence in the debate over this issue.

2.3 Environmental and ecological constraints

Concern over the relationship between effective measures for the management of radioactive waste and environmental impact has been robustly presented throughout the GDF process. The on-going storage of waste in West Cumbria is equally relevant to this discussion as it evolves post conclusion of the MRWS process and again demands a role for the Council in the appraisal of any solution to the issue of waste disposal and interim long term storage.

2.4 Community Engagement

The MRWS process has provided for a structured, managed and resourced means for community engagement. The unique approach applied to the search for a potential GDF has provided valuable lessons and understanding of how consideration of such a complex proposal, with impacts extending across generations, can be approached. There are also lessons to be taken from the close down of the MRWS process particularly as this demonstrates the effective and flexible use of resources.

The protocols adopted by the Council in contributing to the process and in making decisions over participation have been found to be robust and appears to have been accepted as appropriate and adequate to meet the expectations of all stakeholders, irrespective of their stance on the issue.

It is rational to consider how these approaches and the wider lessons learnt through the process might be applied as it inevitably becomes necessary to deal with the consequences of the decision not to participate in the short term and issues relating to the management of waste which remain a key issue for the community within Copeland.

3. CONCLUSIONS

3.1 In the immediate aftermath of the decisions made on the 30th of January, the leaders of both Copeland and Allerdale have established contact with the ministerial team at DECC and sought to engage in dialogue at a ministerial level.

3.2 It is anticipated that this initial contact will enable consideration of the way forward in the context of the outstanding issues highlighted above. Members are requested to acknowledge this position and to accept the principle for the Leader and the Chief Executive to continue dialogue in the light of the issues highlighted above.

5. STATUTORY OFFICER COMMENTS

- 5.1 The Monitoring Officer's comments are: Appropriate for Council to take policy decision on future dialogue with Government and others on legacy waste and associated issues following decisions on 30 January 2013. No further comments.
- 5.2 The Section 151 Officer's comments are: It is important to establish the process for which future negotiations with government can take place, giving due regard to available resources where appropriate
- 5.3 EIA Comments: There are no EIA comments
- 5.4 Policy Framework: "As per the Monitoring Officer comments. The MRWS process is a national Government process led by the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC). The Council has been an active participant throughout the process."
- 5.5 Other Consultee Comments, if any:

List of Appendices

None

List of Background Documents: