

Meeting:	NuLeAF Steering Group, 29 th January 2015
Agenda Item:	7
Subject:	Report on member engagement
Author:	Philip Matthews
Purpose:	To report on the main conclusions of the recent member engagement and proposed action

Introduction:

This report provides a report on the main issues raised by members during recent discussions, and outlines the actions that NuLeAF proposes to take in response.

Recommendation:

That the Steering Group approve the proposed actions outlined in Section 5 of this paper.

Background information

Not applicable.

Review of member engagement and recommended way forward

1. Introduction

In the second half of 2014, NuLeAF undertook various discussions with member local authorities, to get their views on the service that NuLeAF provides and whether there is scope to enhance it. There were two main elements to this engagement, designed to ensure that the view of members who attend meeting regularly, and those who do not, were heard.

- Brief phone interviews were conducted with seven contributing members whose elected members at present are not regular attendees of Steering Group meetings
- A round table discussion with members was held at the NuLeAF AGM on the 15th October

The full range of comments made at the AGM are set out in Appendix 1. A summary of the key points raised during the phone interviews is set out in Appendix 2. This paper summarises the comments made at the AGM and in the phone interviews, and proposes actions to be taken.

2. Overall view of NuLeAF

Members' general opinion of NuLeAF is positive. NuLeAF is felt to have a good reputation both with members and external stakeholders. It provides a useful service to members and acts as an effective voice for local government on nuclear decommissioning and legacy issues.

Local authorities see great benefit in having a funded organisation with a full time secretariat which is able to track developments and participate in relevant meetings on behalf of members. Drawing on this is of great use to elected members and officers, meaning they are better informed than they otherwise would be. Of particular benefit are:

- Meetings of the Steering Group and Radioactive Waste Planning Group, which allow discussion of issues of relevance and the sharing of information;
- The preparation of consultation responses which local authorities are able to draw on in making their own submission;
- Site visits and guest speakers, enabling a direct engagement with NDA, RWM and the wider industry; and
- Dissemination of information, particularly on UK strategy and the international context.

Looking ahead it was felt that certain areas of work were worth developing further. Some members would welcome more work on radioactive waste transportation issues as well as on public health. More engagement with EDF sites was also suggested. These areas of work were felt to offer the potential to draw new members into NuLeAF.

Steering Group, Item 7, Report on member engagement, 29 January 2015

Different views were expressed on the extent to which NuLeAF should be more challenging in its engagement with NDA, RWM and DECC. Some felt that a more robust approach might be useful at times, while others thought that NuLeAF had done well through engaging constructively.

Finally, it was noted that the long service and reputation of the previous Executive Director meant that he was an automatic choice for participation in Government and NDA advisory groups. It was felt that over time the current Director would be able to build a similar reputation with key stakeholders.

3. Communications

Member views on NuLeAF's written communication are positive. Briefing Papers are felt to be clear and informative, topical and covering a wide range of relevant areas of interest.

There is a high level of readership of the E-bulletin and newsletter, though it was suggested that there should be greater sharing of NuLeAF Briefing Papers, Newsletter, E-bulletin and other communications within local authorities, so that a greater understanding of the issues could be built among a wider network of officers and elected members.

It was also proposed that an introductory paper, outlining the key issues around decommissioning and legacy waste management would be useful, helping new members get up to speed with the agenda.

NuLeAF's website has been updated over the past year and is widely used by members. NuLeAF also has a popular LinkedIn group. The website is felt to be user-friendly, and provide information which is not readily available elsewhere. No suggestions for the improvement of the website or new media were made.

4. Steering Group meetings

Steering Group meetings, and those of the Radioactive Waste Planning Group, are well attended. In general, attendees feel the meetings are useful, both in terms of the formal business and the opportunities to listen to and engage with speakers from Government, NDA, RWM and other stakeholders.

Given the significant constraints on local government finance and the time pressures on elected members and officers, the location, frequency and timing of meetings was discussed.

There was broad agreement that four meetings per year is appropriate – enabling regular updates and discussions without placing an excessive burden on members. The current start and finish times were also felt to be right, minimising the need for overnight stays. That said it was recognised that

some elected members struggle to attend four meetings per year, and that there are challenges for Cabinet members in particular in attending given the demands of their role. It was suggested that NuLeAF should explore the scope for members to delegate.

Current meeting locations, London and Manchester, were felt to be as convenient as any alternatives, given the wide geographic spread of the membership. It was also recognised that NuLeAF benefits from the provision of free accommodation in these locations. However, it was proposed that the potential for other local authorities to host meetings be explored. In particular it was suggested that Camden Council be approached, given the convenient location of their offices in terms of the major railway stations in London.

To reduce the cost and time burden, it was suggested that NuLeAF should explore the scope for the use of video or teleconferencing for meetings, although concerns were expressed over the cost and also how such technology could affect the dynamics of group discussions, particularly if a significant number of participants used such technology.

a. Steering Group papers

The general view is that Steering Group papers are clearly written and of appropriate length.

It is accepted that those attending meetings had varying degrees of knowledge on the individual issues being covered, but that in general the papers were pitched at broadly the right level in terms of detail and complexity. Some felt that:

- The use of acronyms and technical terms was too great at times, although the nature of the subject matter makes this difficult to avoid.
- There was an element of repetition in papers. This was particularly an issue for officers who attend both the Radioactive Waste Planning Group and Steering Group meetings as there can be significant overlap in the topics discussed.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The discussions and phone interviews have proved a useful way of gauging the views of NuLeAF members – considerably more effective than previous exercises based on web surveys. It is proposed that a similar exercise is conducted every two years.

The engagement has indicated that members believe NuLeAF provides a valuable and cost-effective service that assists local authorities in their work across a range of related areas. Members feel that meetings are well run and useful, while communications and information provision help build understanding of the complex issues around nuclear decommissioning.

Looking forward, NuLeAF will respond to the suggestions made on how the service can be further improved as follows:

Policy work

- Nuclear-related transportation and public health issues were identified as being of interest to members. The scope for enhanced work in these areas will be considered as part of the Service Plan review process.
- The scope to engage with EDF sites will be explored
- Briefing Paper 28¹, published shortly after the AGM, provides an introduction to radioactive waste management.

Communications

A generally positive view of current paper and electronic communications is held by members. No significant changes are therefore proposed. However, NuLeAF has recently developed a Media Strategy which identifies some potential to enhance the organisation's social media presence, in particular through the establishment of a Twitter feed. This will be developed over the coming year.

Steering Group Meetings

NuLeAF will take a number of actions to address issues raised:

- While meetings will, in general, continue to be held at Manchester Town Hall and Local Government House, NuLeAF will investigate the scope for the use of other Council buildings where these are (a) offered for no cost and (b) are in locations accessible from across England and Wales.
- NuLeAF has conducted preliminary investigations into the potential for video or phone conferencing. Video conferencing has been deemed to be prohibitively expensive. However it is proposed to pilot the use of phone conferencing, where this is available at the venue. It is suggested that, over the next year, up to three members will be able to join each meeting via a phone link. Those wishing to join the meeting by phone will be invited to indicate their interest in advance.
- Whilst it has always been permissible for elected members and officers to send a substitute to attend meetings, this has not perhaps been made clear. Future meeting invitations will reflect this option.
- Further efforts will be made to avoid the use of acronyms where possible. In addition, a list of links to relevant background materials will be provided at the start of each Steering Group paper.
- Greater care will be taken to avoid unnecessary repetition of information in Steering Group and Radioactive Waste Planning Group papers, while recognising that some members only attend one of the two groups.

Other

NuLeAF would ask that member local authorities identify others within their organisation who may be interested in receiving NuLeAF communications, for example Cabinet leads and members of relevant policy areas, and senior staff in planning, environment and economic development.

¹ <http://www.nuleaf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Briefing-Paper-28-RWM-Elected-Members-Briefing.pdf>

Appendix 1: Summary of comments made at the AGM 2014

Written Materials

Written material of good quality, covering a wide range of topics.
Some form of materials tailored for those new to the topic would be beneficial.
Seems to be a repetition in the papers produced.
Complex language and heavy use of acronyms can make comprehension difficult for those new to the area of work.
More briefing material to help inform members and officers would be beneficial, but recognise need for resources to do this.
Website and other information produced clear and concise. They provide information which cannot easily be found elsewhere.
Member authorities should disseminate information from NuLeAF more widely amongst their staff and partner organisations.
More materials which could be used to educate and inform would be useful.
The provision of draft consultation responses is hugely beneficial in saving officer time. The same applies to the support and guidance given by the RWPG in developing radioactive waste policy.

Meetings

Good speakers, coming from senior positions in the organisations they represent.
It is helpful for meetings to be close to mainline train station.
It would be helpful if elected members could send substitutes.
Approach member authorities to use their meeting rooms if practicable.
Fewer meetings may help elected members attend.
Teleconferencing facility would help those who have difficulty travelling to meetings.
Helpful to know who is attending meetings in advance.
Elected members struggle to attend all the meetings to which they are invited and have to prioritise. They need to understand the value in attending NuLeAF meetings.

General

At present NuLeAF only deals with NDA/RSRL sites, not EDF. This could be a barrier to engagement with members and officers from those sites.
Need to raise profile with non-contributing members
Difficult to encourage officers and members to attend meetings from local authorities who don't see themselves as affected by nuclear issues.
A small fee for corresponding members to recognise the benefit they receive from NuLeAF might be useful.
The organisation has a good and growing reputation.
Rely on secretariat to provide expertise as officers don't have the time to become experts themselves.
Look at broadening work areas beyond nuclear licensed sites to include waste transportation and public health issues.
Struggle to make organisations change their behaviour. They do not always follow assurances through. Need to think how to ensure promises are followed through.

Membership benefits

Site visits are beneficial – actually see the issues which need to be addressed.
NuLeAF members and officers have a lot of experience and that is a useful resource which should be made available in some way.
Information on UK and EU strategy is helpful
Need to be more vocal with NDA
The previous Executive Director (ED), Fred Barker, was known for his expertise and he was invited to meetings in his own right, rather than as NuLeAF ED. NuLeAF needs to establish its own worth with industry.
NuLeAF provides an efficient way of keeping informed about issues & developments.
The geographic range of local authorities who participate in NuLeAF is beneficial.

Appendix 2: Summary of feedback from phone interviews with NuLeAF members

Questions:

1. Do you use the NuLeAF website? Never/Sometimes/Regularly

The majority of respondents said they use the website sometimes. They see it as an information resource.

2. Do you read NuLeAF briefings, Steering Group papers, E-bulletin etc? Never/ Sometimes/Regularly

NuLeAF Briefings: There was about a 50/50 split between sometimes and regular reading. It would depend on whether it was felt the topic was pertinent to them.

Steering Group papers: As above.

E-bulletin: All the respondents, except one, read the E-bulletin regularly.

3. At present only an officer from your authority attends the NuLeAF Steering Group meetings. We are keen for more Members in particular to attend. Could NuLeAF change the meetings in ways that would make you/the Elected Member more likely to attend? For example:

- **Changing meeting location**
- **Changing meeting times**
- **Offering a different format to meetings (e.g. more presentations, guest speakers, etc)**

Please note that any alternative meeting location would have to be accessible to members from across England and Wales.

The general feeling was that change of location/timing/format would have no bearing on member attendance.

Several respondents felt that legacy wastes were not a priority topic for their elected member as they were more focused on local rather than national issues. They were content for officers to represent them at the Steering Group. Most officers fed back information from meetings as appropriate.

4. Do you have any other comments on how NuLeAF could improve its support to your local authority? For example in terms of other types of meetings/engagement events, online resources, etc

Two respondents asked whether there was the possibility for a joint NuLeAF/NNLAG meeting.

The issue of teleconferencing was also raised.

One suggestion was that NuLeAF could facilitate the peer review of policies and plans, though it was felt this would be more appropriate to the Radioactive Waste Planning Group rather than the Steering Group meetings.

The overall feedback was that NuLeAF was a credible body, with good standing in the industry and local government. It provided a useful service and that they would continue to support NuLeAF.