

MINUTES

Title of Meeting:	Steering Group
Date:	02/12/2025
Place:	Microsoft teams
Times:	10:00-12:30

Attended:	Cllr Joseph Ghayouba	Cumberland Council
	Cllr David Moore	Cumberland Council
	Cllr Paul Thomas	Folkestone and Hythe Council
	Cllr Tom Daly	East Suffolk Council
	Cllr Tracey Henry	Hull City Council
	Cllr Aled M Jones	Isle of Anglesey Council
	Cllr Mike Rigby	Somerset Council
	Cllr Leigh Redman	Somerset Council
	Jonathan Cook	Cumberland Council
	Eleanor Godesar	Dorset Council
	Terry Burns	Essex County Council
	Martyn Fulcher	East Suffolk Council
	Rae Pickbourne	East Suffolk Council
	Jo Wynn Carter	Folkestone and Hythe Council
	Chadernnay Glenn	Gloucestershire Council
	Amartya Deb	Gloucestershire Council
	Gwen Thomas	Isle of Anglesey Council
	Bryan Geake	Kent Council
	Diane Neville	Lancaster City Council
	Richard Sharples	Lancashire County Council
	Richard Outram	Manchester City Council
	Simon Milson	Maldon District Council
	Annie Keen	Maldon District Council
	Jonathan Holland	NWC
	Ayze Ozcan	Sefton Council
	Tessa Bond	Somerset Council
	James Holbrook	Somerset Council
	Jon Severs	South Gloucestershire Council
	Ross Walker	Suffolk County Council
	Phil Watson	Suffolk County Council
Rachel Whaley	Westmoreland and Furness Council	
Louise Martin	Nuleaf/Somerset Council	
Chloe Atkinson	Nuleaf	
Philip Matthews	Nuleaf	

Speakers	Koulis Efkarpidis John McNamara	NDA NDA
Minute-taker:	Chloe Atkinson	

1	Welcome and apologies
1.1	Apologies received from the following: Michael Barry – Cumberland Council Cllr Gary Pritchard – Isle of Anglesey Council Iwan W Jones – Isle of Anglesey Council Cllr Joshua Roberts – Lancashire County Council Cllr Chris Davies – South Gloucestershire Council Cllr Richard Smith – Suffolk County Council Jonathan Brook – Westmoreland Furness Council
1.2	The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed everyone. He passed to the Executive Director who explained the meeting would be shorter than usual. This was because the NDA Group were limited in what they could engage in during this period, when their next 5 year Strategy (Strategy 5) was being finalised and the implications of the Spending Review were being considered.

2	Minutes of the meeting held on 10th September 2025
2.1	Previous meeting minutes were approved as an accurate record.
Action: CA to add minutes to website	

3	Matters Arising
3.1	<p>The Chair noted that there were a number of Matters Arising and invited PM to update members on the main points.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Following on from the discussion on new nuclear, PM had attended a meeting of the New Nuclear Local Authority Group (NNLAG). The Nuclear Chair had also raised the issue of local authority funding for engagement on new nuclear with Josh McAllister MP, who had contacted GBE-N. This had led to the offer of a meeting with GBE-N and PM was in the process of confirming a date. He would report back to members on progress. 2. In relation to the membership paper, it was agreed to move to a new membership model where only Contributing local authorities would be able to attend Nuleaf meetings. The Constitution had been amended to reflect this, and Nuleaf would be contacting Corresponding authorities and other councils with a nuclear interest to invite them to become full members. Membership renewal requests would be sent to all existing Contributing member authorities in the New Year. 3. In relation to engagement, Nuleaf was developing its media contacts and national and devolved political contacts databases. It was intended to become more engaged in political discussion and thought leadership. Dialogue was also ongoing with NDA Group about how Nuleaf could support local and regional engagement, following the changes to the NDA engagement team.
<p>Action: PM to report back to the next Steering Group meeting on engagement with GBE-N.</p>	

4	Changes in NDA engagement team- John McNamara NDA
4.1	<p>The Chair introduced John McNamara of NDA and invited him to update members on changes to the engagement teams at the NDA Group.</p> <p>John began by outlining the restructuring that was underway across the NDA Group, driven by a Government requirement for greater efficiency in all publicly funded bodies. A reduction in headcount was being pursued through a Mutually Agreed Voluntary Exit scheme (MAVE). Under this any member of staff could apply to leave, but this request would have to be approved by management.</p> <p>There had been an impact on the NDA engagement team. While four stakeholder team members are leaving, this had been a reflection of each staff members age and personal circumstances. NDA plans to maintain engagement, which is a statutory requirement, through internal redeployment, skill reviews, and interim cover.</p> <p>Changes were also underway at NWS, NRS and Sellafield with the MAVE process being at different stages in each part of the NDA.</p> <p>He recognised that stakeholders had raised concerns about continuity and the speed of change, fearing engagement could be deprioritised. NDA acknowledges these risks and will provide clarity in early 2026. John noted that he was limited in what more he could say at present as this was a live process and staff members were entitled to confidentiality.</p> <p>He also noted that he was due to leave under MAVE in 2026. However, he offered to return and speak again once things were clearer in terms of staffing, engagement plans, and opportunities for stakeholder input into future strategy.</p>

4.2

The Chair invited comment and questions.

A number of Nuleaf members voiced concerns about the current situation.

Cllr Tom Daly reflected on a similar discussion at the Sizewell SSG where a significant degree of dismay was expressed. Cllr Daly felt that a more strategic approach should have been adopted. The wholesale departures led to the perception that engagement was not a priority, and this eroded trust.

Cllr David Moore commented that this situation did not reflect well on the NDA. He agreed with Cllr Daly that the decision to grant MAVE across the engagement team had been a mistake, and noted that there is not now a single engagement contact working in West Cumbria. The same situation was true in Scotland and Wales. He felt that establishing interim contacts in different parts of the country was vital, citing a meeting he was trying to set up with Sellafield and DESNZ.

Philip Matthews noted that the departures went beyond the NDA engagement team and that well established Nuleaf contacts in NRS and NWS were either confirmed as leaving or were likely to. He highlighted his request to meet with Paul Vallance to discuss Nuleaf concerns, and noted that he hadn't been able to fix a date for this meeting as yet. He also asked John if the plan was to fill the vacant posts internally or if there was scope for external recruitment, given that not all required skills might be available within the existing workforce.

Cllr Paul Thomas noted that the whole process appeared to have been completed extremely quickly. He noted the respect that he and other stakeholders had for John, but asked that the strength of concerns be reflected back within NDA. He agreed that a meeting between Phil and Paul Vallance would also be important to convey these issues. Finally, he highlighted the departure of David Peattie in 2027 and that other staff were likely to leave. The impacts of changes at the top also required stakeholder engagement in the medium and longer term.

Amartya Deb highlighted his interest in a conversation with John about local engagement.

Cllr Joseph Ghayouba offered his reflection, both as a Sellafield employee and Chair of Nuleaf. He had been surprised at the wholesale departures in the engagement team as at Sellafield there had been a slower pace, working through different functions and teams. While there was an understandable need for a greater emphasis on frontline delivery, there was a need to think about wider functions and capacity. He agreed with John that personal circumstances were important and that the MAVE offer was much more attractive to those around retirement age, as was the case with a number of engagement staff.

John thanked members for their comments and questions. In response he noted:

- That he would be happy to return to a future meeting to update members.
- That in terms of West Cumbria, he would inform David as and when an interim contact was identified. Longer terms the plan was to fill the role with a high-level post, and to support dedicated engagement staff in Scotland and Wales.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> That most functions would be filled by internal reorganisation and repurposing skills. External recruitment is possible but is not a priority.
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Actions:

1. PM to invite John to March meeting.
2. JMcN to work to finalise a date for a meeting between Nuleaf and Paul Vallance, and to feed concerns on lack of contacts back to the NDA.

5	Update on national developments in radioactive waste management
5.1	<p>PM tabled the paper and highlighted a number of items of interest, including the announcement that the Wylfa site on Anglesey has been selected as the location of the UK's first Small Modular Reactors (SMRs), supported by Great British Energy-Nuclear (GBE-N).</p> <p>The Chair invited questions and comments.</p>
5.2	<p>Cllr. Aled Morris Jones and Gwen Thomas both spoke on the GBE-N announcement of SMR's at Wylfa. They welcomed this and felt it was hugely exciting and vital for their communities, providing economic certainty and the creation of 3,000 construction jobs and 1,000 operational roles.</p> <p>Question: Are your communities entirely positive about SMRs, or has there also been some negative feedback? <i>Answer: Cllr Morris Jones commented that the majority on Anglesey welcomed it based on the jobs and investment, but that some opposition exists.</i></p> <p><i>Gwen Thomas added that while the community view was mostly positive, there was a need to learn lessons from other projects such as Hinkley Point C.</i></p> <p>Jon Severs expressed disappointment that Oldbury had not been selected for SMRs, but noted GBE-N's assurance that Oldbury remains a potential site for new nuclear, with surveys and preparatory work continuing.</p>

6	Update on Strategy 5 – Koulis Efkarpidis, NDA
6.1	<p>Koulis introduced himself as the strategy manager and chief editor for Strategy 5 within the NDA.</p> <p>Strategy 5 had completed a 12-week public consultation in September 2025, with nearly 100 responses, representing the highest engagement level to date for an NDA Strategy.</p> <p>The feedback had proposed a range of refinements to the draft Strategy. He and his team have addressed comments around the need to strengthen the text around local authority involvement, socio-economic commitments, stakeholder engagement, and sustainability measures.</p> <p>The post-consultation draft has been endorsed by key governance groups and will go to the NDA Board next week, with publication planned for March 2026, ahead of the Scottish pre-election period.</p> <p>He commented that Nuleaf's comprehensive input has influenced change and will continue shaping implementation, including workstreams on radioactive waste strategy, integrated waste management, and socio-economic reviews. Lessons learned such as</p>

	early engagement and extended review periods will guide future consultations to ensure transparency and collaboration.
6.2	PM praised the improved process and confirmed it was a useful step forward.

7	Update on the Geological Disposal Facility siting process
7.1	<p>PM presented the paper.</p> <p>He noted that the GDF programme faces significant uncertainty, with only two West Cumbria communities still engaged following Lincolnshire’s withdrawal.</p> <p>NWS’s submission to the Secretary of State on whether to proceed to Site Characterisation and boreholes was now likely to be in spring 2026. A decision to delay or end the process in Cumberland would have considerable risks in terms of storage capacity at Sellafield, the impact on the West Cumbrian community and in undermining new nuclear plans, as spent fuel management assumes timely GDF availability.</p> <p>Many stakeholders believe that government must commit to a funded, accelerated GDF timeline integrated with nuclear expansion, and Nuleaf continues to monitor developments and advocate for strategic clarity.</p>
7.2	<p>Cllrs Moore, Daly and Thomas expressed their concerns about the growing uncertainty around the GDF programme. They highlighted the mixed messages that had been coming out about the programme, the lack of a Plan B, and the need for urgent clarity as regulators prepare staged guidance, warning that pushing nuclear expansion without a firm waste strategy is irresponsible.</p> <p>Question: What about Lincolnshire? Is it completely off the map for a GDF?</p> <p><i>Answer: PM responded that a political decision to withdraw had been taken by the new administration in Lincolnshire, based on a manifesto commitment. It would therefore be difficult to resurrect the process there without a major change in policy.</i></p> <p>Question: If a GDF takes too long, what happens when power stations run out of space to store Spent Fuel and waste?</p> <p><i>Answer: Cllr David Moore responded that there was a major challenge at Sellafield as any significant delay would require new and expensive stores to be provided. This would lead to challenges around space in and around the site and raises community consent issues.</i></p>

8	Presentation on Borsele Conditions Group – Philip Matthews, Nuleaf
8.1	<p>PM delivered a presentation on his recent visit to Borsele in the Netherlands, organised and funded by GMF Europe.</p> <p>The visit co-incided with the last meeting of the Borsele Conditions Group, set up to oversee community discussions around plans for a new nuclear plant in the area. The Group involved 100 local people, selected to represent all parts of the community and with half its members under the age of 35.</p>

	<p>The meeting had been very positive, being run by an independent facilitator and engaging all members. Together they had agreed over 40 conditions that the community wanted the nuclear developer and Government to agree to if the nuclear plant was to progress.</p> <p>The Borsele model offered a good model that the UK should consider emulating. The NDA had commissioned research on deliberative democracy from Aberdeen University but it was not sure how this work would be taken forward.</p>
8.2	<p>A number of members praised the Borsele model as inspiring and highly consultative, highlighting its strong youth engagement and innovative approach beyond usual practice. It was commented that a significant value of Nuleaf's international engagement was the learning of good practice that had scope to be used in the UK context.</p> <p>Question: Has the NDA commissioned study on deliberative democracy, being undertaken by Aberdeen University, concluded or is it ongoing? <i>Answer: Philip Matthews responded that, as he understood it, the study has been completed but has not yet been published. He expressed concern that it may become sidelined during this period of change in NDA.</i></p>
<p>Action: PM to write to DESNZ and NDA to highlight the Borsele example and suggest it is considered in a UK context.</p>	


9	Nuleaf member discussion on engagement
9.1	<p>Members returned to the issues around NDA engagement. They expressed strong concern over NDA's removal of its stakeholder engagement team. Cllr Tom Daly urged a more assertive stance, Cllr David Moore criticized the lack of planning and suggested escalation to DESNZ, Cllr Joseph Ghayouba warned that engagement cannot be sidelined amid major projects like GDF and SMRs, and Cllr Paul Thomas highlighted the erosion of trust.</p> <p>It was agreed to draft two letters, one to NDA and one to DESNZ, demanding urgent clarity and a clear strategy for future engagement.</p>
<p>Action: PM to draft letters to NDA (Paul Vallance) and DESNZ (Lord Vallance) setting out member concerns, and share these with the Chair and Vice Chair before sending out.</p>	

10	Date of next meeting
10.1	The next meeting would be held online on the 11 th March between 10:00 – 15:00.

11	Any other Business
11.1	Amartya Deb (Gloucestershire Council) – noted that he would like to participate in the practice planning guidance development for nuclear decommissioning.
<p>Action: PM to contact Amartya separately to discuss.</p>	

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