

MINUTES

Title of Meeting:	Steering Group
Date:	15/07/2026
Place:	Cumberland Council Offices
Times:	09:15-13:30
Minute-taker(s):	Chloe Atkinson Louise Martin

Attended:	Cllr Joseph Ghayouba Cllr Paul Thomas Cllr Mark Fryer Cllr David Moore Cllr Tom Daly Cllr Dyfrig Siencyn Cllr Graeme Austin Cllr Mike Rigby Cllr Chris Davies Cllr Adrian Whittle Jonathan Cook Nik Hardy Iain Irving Andrew Seeking Martyn Fulcher Bethany Rance Terry Burns Jo Wynn-Carter Amartya Deb Iwan Robat Jones Charlotte Rushmere James Holbrook Ross Walker Rachel Whaley Louise Martin Chloe Atkinson Philip Matthews Michael Pemberton	Cumberland Council (Chair) Folkestone and Hythe Council (Vice Chair) Cumberland Council Cumberland Council East Suffolk Council Gwynedd Council Lancashire County Council Somerset Council South Gloucestershire Council Suffolk County Council Cumberland Council Cumberland Council Cumberland Council (Speaker) Cumberland Council East Suffolk Council East Suffolk Council Essex County Council Folkestone and Hythe Council Gloucestershire County Council Gwynedd Council South Gloucestershire Council Somerset Council Suffolk County Council Westmorland and Furness Council Nuleaf/Somerset Council Nuleaf Nuleaf BEC (Speaker)
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	Mark Rouse Matt Legg Alyson Armett Mike Piggott	DESNZ (Speaker) Sellafield Sellafield (Speaker) NWS (Speaker)
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1	Welcome and apologies
1.1	Apologies received from the following: Cllr Archie Dryburgh, Dumfries and Galloway Council
<i>Actions Agreed, Target Date (s), Lead Officer (s):</i>	

2	Minutes of the meeting
2.1	Minutes agreed to be an accurate record.
Action: CA to add minutes to the website	

3	Matters arising
3.1	Noted.

4	Update on national developments in radioactive waste management
4.1	Philip Matthews presented the paper and highlighted a few items, in particular the changes to the engagement teams at NDA Group and plans for a Nuleaf meeting for Welsh member authorities.

5	Update on the Geological Disposal Facility Siting process
5.1	Philip Mathews delivered an update on the Geological Disposal Facility (GDF) siting process, with the key item of note being the current pause in the GDF process, awaiting a decision on next steps by the Secretary of State. The paper also highlighted international learning from Sweden's geological disposal programme, and progress in returning vitrified high-level waste from Sellafield to overseas customers.

6	Seminar: The Evolving nuclear landscape in Cumberland.
6.1	Cumberland Council engagement in nuclear and plans for Pioneer Park: Michael Pemberton of BEC and Iain Irving of Cumberland Council. Pioneer Park is a large-scale clean energy and economic development project designed to diversify the West Cumbria economy and reduce long-term reliance on Sellafield-related employment. The project has completed its first community engagement event in Whitehaven and has received NDA support to test market demand and develop a masterplan, due for completion by the end of September. The project aims to retain locally generated power from Small Modular Reactors (SMRs) within the region to attract businesses, with potential future tenants including data centres, advanced computing, artificial intelligence, hydrogen production and other energy-intensive industries. Opportunities are also being explored to provide

local businesses with access to computing capacity, alongside the development of a district heat network to support local facilities and help tackle fuel poverty. Community benefit and social value remain central to the project, including consideration of a community equity stake in land released by the NDA. Opportunities linked to the Government's AI Growth Zone policy are also being explored, although current power delivery timescales may present challenges.

Question: What are the realistic alternatives to Small Modular Reactors (SMRs), and could gas be used as an interim power source?

Answer: Nuclear remains the preferred long-term solution. However, options such as hydrogen-enabled gas turbines and some renewable technologies are being considered. Gas-powered generation is likely to be the most realistic short-term option for greenfield developments while longer-term solutions are established.

Question: What will electricity from SMRs cost?

Answer: Commercial data is currently limited. Early indications from micro-reactor projects suggest costs could be competitive, particularly where electricity is supplied directly to users rather than through the national grid.

Question: How will waste from SMRs be managed?

Answer: BEC noted they are not SMR technology specialists but indicated that SMRs are generally expected to produce less waste proportionally than conventional nuclear reactors.

Question: Have you considered advanced reactor technologies and their future fuel requirements?

Answer: A significant amount of work is taking place around Advanced Modular Reactors (AMRs) and alternative fuel types. One aspiration is for the area to develop capability that could support future first-of-a-kind technologies, fuel development, testing and potentially waste management solutions associated with advanced reactor programmes.

Question: How will economic benefits be reinvested locally?

Answer: We aim to maximise local social value through community benefit mechanisms, local supply chain opportunities and increased economic activity. Community equity models are also being explored.

Question: Will benefits extend beyond West Cumbria, including Barrow?

Answer: There are opportunities for wider regional benefits through links with advanced manufacturing, robotics, defence and energy sectors. The ambition is to create broad regional growth centred on West Cumbria rather than focusing on a single location.

Question: Isn't it the case that significant stakeholder engagement will be required, involving local authorities, parish councils, workforce representatives, trade unions, businesses and community organisations?

Answer: It is important to work with communities from the outset. The approach must be 'working with communities, not doing it to communities'.

6.2	The UK National Nuclear skills plan: Mark Rouse Mark Rouse provided an overview of the Nuclear Skills Plan, launched in 2024 to address growing workforce challenges across the nuclear sector. The plan is built on collaboration between civil nuclear, defence, industry, government, education providers and local partners, with the need for action reinforced by the Nuclear Regulatory Task Force review and wider industrial strategies focused on energy security, defence and economic growth. The sector continues to face challenges including an ageing workforce, skills shortages and the need to improve diversity, with around 40,000 additional workers expected to be required over the next five years. The strategy is focused on attracting new entrants and mid-career changers, retaining existing staff through career development and leadership programmes, and enabling workforce growth through improved skills planning, training provision and data. It was also noted that approximately 80% of required skills are transferable, with only around 20% being nuclear-specific. Work continues with organisations including Skills England, the Nuclear Institute and ECITB, while stakeholder engagement is evolving, with organisations such as Nuleaf and BEC being important partners. Question: How does the sector plan to engage younger people outside traditional employment or education pathways? <i>Answer: The focus is on developing clear career pathways, appropriate curriculum development and working with Skills England. Local and regional skills plans will be important in helping connect young people to opportunities in the sector.</i> Question: Are entry requirements (e.g. for 5 GCSEs) creating barriers for some communities? Sellafield is undertaking initiatives that help individuals achieve foundation skills. <i>Answer: The comments reinforce the need for multiple entry routes into the sector, combining academic and vocational approaches to attract people from different backgrounds.</i> Question: How is the sector assessing the impact of artificial intelligence and the extent to which jobs may evolve as AI becomes more widely adopted? <i>Answer: The Nuclear Institute is actively examining the implications of AI and the NSST team is receiving briefings on the topic. AI is developing rapidly and the sector is working to understand both the opportunities and impacts on future workforce requirements.</i> Question: Could growth in nuclear employment draw workers away from other sectors, increase wage pressures and require the import of labour from outside the region? <i>Answer: This challenge is recognised and has been experienced previously in areas such as Dounreay. Regional Skills Hubs are expected to provide a forum for addressing these issues, although no simple solution currently exists.</i>
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	Question: Why was Westinghouse not included in the stakeholder diagrams? <i>Answer: Westinghouse feeds into the project through the supply chain and is therefore not represented as a direct stakeholder.</i> Question: How can the sector prepare people for future regulatory expectations when many future requirements remain unclear? <i>Answer: The regulator has an important role, but the primary responsibility lies with Site Licence Companies. The focus should be on providing staff with valuable experience across a range of activities, including decommissioning work. Current retention rates suggest the sector is succeeding in developing and retaining skilled staff.</i>
6.3	Grand Challenges and High Hazards at Sellafield: Alyson Armett Alyson Armett provided an overview of Sellafield's updated corporate strategy, which reflects changing national priorities around both energy security and national security. Sellafield remains a nationally important asset, operating in a significantly different environment from when the NDA was established 20 years ago, with new nuclear development now forming a major part of the national agenda. The organisation's highest priorities continue to be reducing risks associated with its four major high-hazard legacy facilities: the Pile Fuel Storage Pond, Magnox Storage Pond, Magnox Swarf Storage Silos and Pile Fuel Cladding Silo. While progress continues to be made in hazard reduction, significant challenges remain due to ageing infrastructure, including the management of deteriorating facilities, addressing leaks from the Magnox Swarf Storage Silos and the retrieval of approximately 2,200 waste containers from the Pile Fuel Cladding Silo, of which around 70 have been processed to date. Looking ahead, strategic issues include future plutonium management policy, the potential development of a new plutonium processing facility, optimisation of licensed nuclear land and wider NDA-owned land, and decisions on geological disposal and long-term waste management. Question: As the UK expands its nuclear programme, how can Government ensure sufficient funding is available for decommissioning, waste management, and other back-end activities? <i>Answer: Discussions are ongoing within the NDA regarding the Spending Review funding settlements, alongside engagement with regulators. It is important to recognise the additional asset care and maintenance costs that arise from programme delays. Long-term, continuous funding is essential, as is ensuring adequate supply chain capacity, resources, and land availability to support delivery.</i> Question: How can the history, knowledge and experience associate with Sellafield and its communities be preserved as facilities are decommissioned? <i>Answer: Sellafield recognises the importance of retaining organisational knowledge and historical information. Knowledge management and retention processes are in</i>

	<i>place to capture valuable expertise, particularly from people with long experience of operating historic facilities. This information is used to support future decommissioning activities and decision-making.</i>
6.4	Low level waste management and the LLWR site: Mike Piggott The Low-Level Waste Repository (LLWR) continues to play a central role in UK low-level waste management while operating within a community that includes nuclear, agricultural and tourism interests. An updated Environmental Safety Case (ESC) will be submitted in 2026, setting out future expectations for the site's end state and operational limits, including the eventual installation of a permanent engineered cap across the facility. Significant progress has been made by NWS in applying the waste hierarchy, with around 95% of low-level waste being sent for disposal in 2009 compared with around 98% being diverted from disposal where possible by 2025. Waste diversion helps protect long-term repository capacity and supports more sustainable waste management practices. Following concerns regarding primary containment degradation, the Environment Agency required action to accelerate capping works, and a Southern Trench Interim Membrane (STIM) project is currently underway. The project, which is expected to be completed by the end of the financial year, is costing approximately £50 million and covers an area equivalent to around 17 football pitches. The final engineered cap is expected to be a major programme costing approximately £500 million over eight years, that Graeme Construction has established a local presence to deliver the STIM project, and that LLWR continues to promote its social licence to operate through community investment initiatives, including the Copeland Community Fund. Question: What is the source of aggregate materials being used in the STIM works and future capping projects? <i>Answer: Aggregate is currently being supplied from Breedon's Shap Quarry. Transport challenges, including tunnel constraints, have required alternative delivery routes. Future options are being explored, including alternative and non-virgin material sources.</i> Question: Does Near Surface Disposal (NSD) remain part of future plans and could the LLWR site play an expanded role in future NSD? <i>Answer: The recently submitted Environmental Safety Case supports a risk-based approach demonstrating that existing waste can remain safely in place. The current priority is supporting continued disposal operations and implementation of the Environmental Safety Case. However, discussions around Near Surface Disposal could potentially be revisited in the future.</i>

7	Date of next meeting
7.1	The next meeting will be held online on Wednesday the 7 th October from 10am to 1pm

8	Any other business
8.1	None discussed

INTERNAL FOI CHECKLIST FOR MINUTES OF OFFICER MEETINGS

To be completed by the chair in respect of ALL minutes.

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	2. Provided in confidence	
	3. Intended for future publication	x
	4. Related to criminal proceedings	
	5. That might prejudice law enforcement	
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	8. Information that could endanger an individual's health & safety	
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	10. That is prejudicial to commercial interests	
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	12. Other Please describe	

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