

**Managing Radioactive Waste Safely: A Framework for Implementing Geological Disposal**

**EXECUTIVE MEMBER:** Leader, Cllr Elaine Woodburn  
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**Summary:**

The report advises the Council of the White Paper on Managing Radioactive Waste Safely: A Framework for Implementing Geological Disposal, which initiates a nationwide process for identifying the site of a Deep Geological Repository to dispose of waste with higher levels of radioactivity.

This report also identifies the next steps the Council needs to take to comply with its agreed policy position on this process.

**Recommendations:**

1. The Council is recommended to note that:
  - a) Initial discussions with Copeland's residents and Government on whether to participate in the Governments process will take place in line with Council policy.
  - b) To facilitate this process the Council will 'express an interest' to Government, and seek funding to engage the local community and partners in the issues before deciding whether to 'participate'.
  - c) A work programme and partnership arrangements designed to consider all the issues needed to for this Council to make a Decision to Participate will be reported back for agreement.
  - d) The partnership arrangements and work programme will be developed with the full involvement of relevant local partners including the County Council.
2. The Council is asked to agree to establish a Working Group of five members to provide the focus for this work within the Council

## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Copeland Borough Council has a long history in dealing with nuclear issues and with some 80% of the nation's higher activity radioactive waste temporarily residing in Copeland our community has a strong interest in ensuring that a safe and permanent means of disposal is found as soon as possible.
- 1.2 The National Managing Radioactive Waste Safely Programme was started back in 2001 and all through this process the Council has been an active participant in the development of policy approaches. This has included direct involvement in detailed working arrangements, formal responses from the Council to consultations, and meetings with the Committee on Radioactive Waste Management many times, As a result the process, as now proposed, creates no surprises for the Council and is one which we believe has the potential to deliver a positive outcome for all.

## 2. NEW WHITE PAPER

- 2.1 On 12<sup>th</sup> June the Government issued the White Paper Managing Radioactive Waste Safely: A Framework for Implementing Deep Geological Disposal. This sets out the Governments plans for working in partnership with local communities to explore the best location for a geological repository and agreeing a package of community benefits to offset any detrimental impacts on the locality. A copy has been sent out to all members. Along side the White Paper DEFRA have sent an invitation to take part in the national process to all Local Authorities. (Attached as Appendix 1).
- 2.2 The process outlined, is generally, in line with the views put forward by Copeland Borough Council over many years in relation to voluntarism, partnership, community engagement, community benefits and right of withdrawal. but first and foremost a safe and environmentally secure geological location being a pre-requisite for any eventual siting decision.
- 2.3 The process for determining the final location will be lengthy, spanning many years. Step one of this process is the 'expression of interest'. This is the point at which local communities register their '**without commitment**' interest in discussions with Government about potential involvement in a repository siting process and allows them to have resources to address all the issues they need to before deciding whether to make a formal 'decision to participate,' the next step in the process.
- 2.4 As this Council has previously stated it will be important that the views of our local community are sought before agreeing whether to participate or not. Councils that express an initial interest to Government will be

provided with the resources to undertake this initial work, through an engagement package, before making that decision.

- 2.5 Whilst the NDA is charged with the process of delivering a geological repository, the Local Authorities in the areas participating in the process will have the right to decide whether such a facility can go ahead by the ability to exercise a 'right of withdrawal'.
- 2.6 The Local Authority is expected to take the lead in a partnership set up with the purpose of making recommendations to the Council ('decision making body') on any future decisions in this process.

### 3. OPTIONS

- 3.1 The Executive could decide not to take any action in relation to this programme. However, as our community has a strong interest in resolving the issue of the radioactive waste in Copeland and is the Borough with the highest level of expertise in this area, it would be expected that we would engage in the initial discussions prior to deciding whether to participate.
- 3.2 The option proposed is to express an initial interest in order to secure resources to examine the process and potential in greater detail before coming to a decision. The approach is fully in line with the policy we have adopted on this matter. The Council's agreed policy is:  
  
**'Copeland Borough Council will, in view of the presence of approximately 70% of the nation's higher activity wastes in the Borough already, would be prepared to talk to Government about the potential for a partnership between the Borough and Government, with the possibility of Copeland hosting facilities for the nation in the future. However, any such decision would be without prejudice or commitment, and any decision to move forward would need to be the subject of a wide consultation in West Cumbria, and subject to the views of the people of Copeland.'**
- 3.3 This policy was incorporated into the Energy Coast Master Plan Document and was endorsed by:

- i) Cumbria County Council
- ii) Allerdale Borough Council
- iii) Cumbria Vision
- iv) West Cumbria Partnership
- v) North West Development Agency

Recent meetings with Cumbrian Local Authorities have confirmed their support for taking this approach. Cumbria County Councils view will be considered by its full Council on the 26<sup>th</sup> June.

3.4 A wide range of issues will need to be considered before the Council could consider taking a decision to participate. It is intended that a partnership is set up to identify the relevant issues to be considered at this stage. A project plan will need to be drawn up and costed. Resources will be sought from Government to manage the decision making process. Most of the detailed technical questions would only arise if Copeland were eventually to decide to 'participate'. Such a decision would need to be considered by this Council

3.5 Initial work will include:

- Establishing the partnership and governance arrangements
- Ensuring satisfactory reporting arrangements to this Council
- Advising the local community of the issues and determining their prevailing views
- Ensuring the process going forward was acceptable in all respects and represents best practice
- Being clear that Copeland Borough Council will be the decision making body, as defined in the White Paper
- Understanding the implications of the new statement in the White Paper that "in the event that at some point in the future, voluntarism and partnership does not look likely to work Government reserves the right to explore other approaches"
- Determining a view on how and when a Community Benefits package should be available both to offset impacts, but also to manage the risks of embarking on such a process
- Carrying out by the British Geological Society of a desk top geological exercise which would filter out unsuitable areas.

3.6 In order to determine the nature of the full partnership required it is proposed that key relevant local partners including the County Council, are brought together to develop a planned approach to informing a decision to participate or not.

#### **4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 Once an interest has been expressed to Government in engaging in discussions, resources will be made available to the Council to explore the issues and engage further with local people to determine their views.

**List of Appendices:** Appendix 1: Invitation Letter  
Appendix 2: Key Points Summary

**List of Background Documents:**

White Paper. Managing Radioactive Waste Safely: A framework for Implementing Geological Disposal

Report to Council: Copeland Response to Consultation Document

Energy Coast Master Plan Summary

**List of Consultees:**

Executive Members, Corporate Team, Nuclear and Sustainability Policy Advisor.

**CHECKLIST FOR DEALING WITH KEY ISSUES**

Please confirm against the issue if the key issues below have been addressed. This can be by either a short narrative or quoting the paragraph number in the report in which it has been covered.

Impact on Crime and Disorder	There would be no immediate impact however long term a successful economy will help to manage crime and disorder levels.
Impact on Sustainability	There would be a major impact on economic, community and environmental sustainability. All of these issues will need to be thoroughly addressed as part of the process of consideration.
Impact on Rural Proofing	There could be a major impact on rural issues, which will need to be fully assessed if a decision to participate is eventually made.
Health and Safety Implications	Health and safety issues must be the overriding consideration in any future project design development and siting
Impact on Equality and Diversity Issues	None directly
Children and Young Persons Implications	Such a project will have major intergenerational impacts in this area, if it proceeds. There is a need to fully engage young people in the issues and

	understand their feelings.
Human Rights Act Implications	Current proposed process removes this issue as a willing community is required. However, there is an need to understand any Governmental fall back position in case of the process not succeeding, and any subsequent implications for local human rights.
Monitoring Officer comments	No comment
S. 151 Officer comments	In order for informed decision making through the consultation process it is imperative that information from the cost benefit analysis is available for all

Is this a Key Decision? Yes.

The policy outlined in this report, was a key decision. In this instance, the decision to engage with Government, as an 'expression of interest', within itself, is not.