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**COMMITTEE ON RADIOACTIVE WASTE MANAGEMENT (CoRWM)  
OPEN MEETING**

**15<sup>th</sup> September 2020**

**Venue:** MSTeams Videoconference

**Timing:** 10:00 – 12:00

**Chair:** Sir Nigel Thrift (CoRWM Chair)

**Members attending:** Campbell Gemmell, Claire Corkhill, Penny Harvey, Neil Hyatt, Ray Kemp, Mark Kirkbride, Derek Lacey, Richard Shaw, Geraldine Thomas, Stephen Tromans and Andrew Walters

**Attending:** Mariana Ghosh (BEIS), Hannah Smith (Sheffield University), David Brazier (Environment Agency), Phil Matthews (NuLeAF), Eileen Mckeever (RWM), Bruce Cairns (RWM), Petratjitske Kalshoven (University of Manchester), Roy Payne (GDF Watch), David Collier (White Ox Ltd) and David Lowry

**Apologies:** None

**Summary**

The 15<sup>th</sup> September Open Plenary was held by videoconference because of the current coronavirus situation in the UK.



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## Agenda

*Agenda 15<sup>th</sup> September 2020*

1. **Meeting open, welcome and introductory comments (Chair)**
2. **Declaration of Interests**
3. **Approval of Minutes from the Previous Plenary**
4. **Update on Subgroup Activities and Plans**

*Key topics:*

- a) SG 1 Working with Communities (Penny Harvey)
  - b) SG 2 GDF Geology and Delivery (Richard Shaw)
  - c) SG 3 Planning and Regulation (Stephen Tromans)
  - d) SG 4 Scottish Government Activities (Campbell Gemmell)
  - e) SG 5 Welsh Government Activities (Gerry Thomas)
  - f) SG 6 Storage of Waste, Spent Fuel, and Materials (Derek Lacey)
  - g) SG 7 Task and Finish (Mark Kirkbride)
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5. **Presentation – Speaker: Professor Geraldine Thomas - “*Health effects of radiation*”**
  6. **Questions from the Public**
  7. **AOB**
  8. **Next Meeting: 24<sup>th</sup> November 2020, Edinburgh (TBC)**



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### **Agenda Item 1: Welcome and Introductory comments**

#### *Welcome to Attendees*

1. Nigel Thrift (NT) welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked attendees for joining the CoRWM Open plenary. NT noted that CoRWM adapted to the new ways of working via videoconference as a result of COVID-19.
2. Short introductions were given by CoRWM members and all other attendees.
3. NT presented a summary of the Chair's recent activities.
4. NT noted the publications by NDA of the Draft Strategy 4 for consultation and Near Surface Disposal strategic position paper.
5. NT noted that Copeland Council announced in July that it was opening discussions with RWM, the developer for the GDF.
6. NT informed that CoRWM members are working on five position papers on; GDF construction cost, innovation, regulation and planning, integrated communication strategy and Near Surface Disposal.
7. NT also mentioned that a new website for CoRWM is in progress.
8. NT stated that CoRWM advised BEIS on the review of UK Policy for radioactive substances and nuclear decommissioning.
9. CoRWM presented at the NuLeAF Steering Group on 9th September 2020

### **Agenda Item 2: Declaration of interests**

10. None

### **Agenda Item 3: Approval of minutes from the previous plenary**

11. Minutes of the previous Open plenary were approved



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#### **Agenda Item 4: Update on Subgroup activities and plans**

##### *Subgroup 2: GDF Geology and Delivery (Richard Shaw)*

12. Subgroup 2 is tasked with offering scrutiny and advice to the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) and Radioactive waste management (RWM) on activities relating to a Geological disposal facility (GDF) safety case and siting process. SG2 also advise on any technologies applicable to GDF development.
13. Because there has been no meeting for some time because of Covid-19 RS mentioned the main activities of SG2 and topics of future work:
  - The position paper on Deep boreholes that was prepared last year has been published on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk) .
  - SG2 met regularly with RWM to discuss progress their organisational preparations for site investigation and development of a GDF.
  - A position paper on GDF construction costs taking into consideration modern approaches to underground mining and the creation of underground infrastructure has been drafted and will be published later this year once finalised.
14. SG2 (and the whole of CoRWM) is available to support Copeland Borough Council as and when required as they consider hosting a GDF and the formation of a Working Group.

##### *Subgroup 3: Planning and Regulation (Stephen Tromans QC)*

15. The role of Subgroup 3 is to provide advice to the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) and Devolved Administrations (DAs) on planning, infrastructure and regulation as well as reviewing implications of UK's exit from the EU.
16. ST summarised the following SG3 activities;
  - A Position paper on Regulation will be finalised and published by the end of the year.
  - SG3 is following developments on Near Surface Disposal as well as the Planning Reform White paper.
  - SG3 is also interested in the implications of the Euratom exit on international obligations and safeguards with nuclear material in a GDF.



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- SG3 will look into Offshore GDF possibilities and the issues on legislation and international law.

*Subgroup 4: Scottish Government Activities (Campbell Gemmell)*

17. The role of Subgroup 4 is to provide scrutiny and advice to the Scottish Government on issues of relevance to waste management, particularly focussing on activities related to the management of higher activity waste (HAW) in Scotland.
18. CG mentioned that the Scottish Government (SG) radioactive waste team is currently stretched due to Covid-19 issues leading to a delay in relevant activity.
19. SG4 met virtually with Scottish Government (SG) officials to discuss a review of the 2011 policy relating to near-site, near-surface storage (and disposal) and the general approach to HAW in Scotland. The subgroup advised SG on the PID developed for the Review and suggested it needed better to reflect developments over the last 10 years and also to connect with the NDA strategy review and the BEIS policy review ongoing. There was also scope to consider the issues of storage and disposal across the UK. Response from SG on the input provided by the sub-group is awaited.
20. CG mentioned the potential relevance for CoRWM's work of the new body identified in the Continuity Bill in Scotland, Environmental Standards Scotland (ESS). The main role of ESS is intended to be replacing the scrutiny and governance and compliance oversight roles of the EU Commission post 1 January 2021. The body is intended to operate on an interim basis prior to being fully and formally constituted in September 2021 and SG4 will follow its development.

*Subgroup 5: Welsh Government (WG) activities –Geraldine Thomas*

21. The role of subgroup 5 is to scrutinise the Welsh Government (WG) activities in relation to implementing a geological disposal policy and report WG activities to CoRWM.
22. GT mentioned that her work as subgroup Chair began in December 2019 since then SG5 has met with WG to discuss communication with communities.
23. GT stated that WG activity is currently focussed on Euratom exit and Covid-19. The WG is currently ensuring their policies align with radioactive waste management policies in other UK nations post Brexit.



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*Subgroup 6: Storage of waste, Spent Fuel and Materials (Derek Lacey)*

24. Subgroup 6 is tasked with the scrutiny of the end of the Magnox reprocessing programme and the storage and disposal of spent fuel, uranium and plutonium. SG6 also provides advice to the Nuclear decommissioning Authority (NDA) on integrated waste management developments.
25. SG6 has been able to maintain engagement with NDA throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. DL reported that:
  - Magnox reprocessing is set for completion over the coming year following disruption due to Covid-19. The plant has recently resumed operation and the intent is to minimise the residual amount of Magnox fuel that would require conditioning and storage for ultimate disposal.
  - CoRWM is scrutinising the NDA strategy which has recently been issued for consultation. SG6 will focus on two areas: options for management of plutonium and integrated waste management. DL noted that Strategy 4 does not introduce any significant changes for management of plutonium and that it reflects recent developments in integrated waste management.
  - SG plans to hold discussions with NDA on options for Uranium management, optimisation of research, development and innovation and the radioactive waste inventory.

*Subgroup 7: Task and Finish (Mark Kirkbride)*

26. The main role of Subgroup 7 is to provide advice on UK policy for radioactive substances and nuclear decommissioning. SG7 has been interested in near-surface disposal (NSD), following a briefing from NDA in July. CoRWM is in discussion with NDA concerning NSD strategy and a CoRWM position paper on NSD is in progress.
27. SG7 has reviewed a working draft on radioactive substances and nuclear decommissioning policy from the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS). A meeting later in the year is planned to discuss an updated version of the draft consultation.
28. The GDF construction costs position paper has been reviewed following first draft and is in the process of being reviewed and updated. This paper gives an updated cost estimate from the paper published in 2004. Following a final review on inventory, publication is intended by the end of the year.



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*Subgroup 1: Working with Communities (Penny Harvey)*

29. The role of Subgroup 1 is to scrutinise and advise on the communications between the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA) and Radioactive Waste Management (RWM) and their respective communications with communities. PH noted that SG1 supports the communications task of offering clear and comprehensive information on policy and at the same time listening, engaging, and learning from communities.
30. PH described how SG1 give advice to RWM and NDA on integrated communications strategy on how to inform and engage communities in the present and how best to develop communication in the future.
31. Engagement with the public through public consultation was discussed. PH noted that CoRWM and associated organisations are committed to fostering accessible engagement to promote an inclusive conversation. In particular the importance of building common ground and engaging the younger generation in discussion of social and ethical concerns was noted.
32. SG1 is engaged with RWM and BEIS in relation to the launch of the first Working Group, as Copeland Borough Council has volunteered as a potential host for a Geological Disposal Facility.
33. CoRWM can also offer independent information to communities. PH emphasised that CoRWM cannot be seen to persuade or dissuade regarding the GDF but are available to discuss issues raised by communities.
34. PH described the development of the CoRWM website. Students from the University of Sheffield have created a set of infographics to make the information on the website more visible and more accessible. SG1 are exploring with BEIS the possibilities for developing a new website.

**Questions from members of the public**

35. Petratjitske Kalshoven (PK) asked about the visibility of CoRWM and how concerned the committee is about their visibility and engagement with the public.
36. Sir Nigel Thrift explained that CoRWM's remit is to advise BEIS and the Devolved Administrations on radioactive waste management issues. The public engagement leading to the Implementing Geological Disposal White paper was strong and CoRWM hopes to bring this engagement back to the future public meetings.





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37. Neil Hyatt mentioned that producing Position papers is the way for CoRWM to be visible and this work is in progress.
38. Phil Matthews (PM) asked about the role of the local authorities in the communication and the interface between local authorities and communities.
39. Penny Harvey explained that local authorities are central in communication. The Nuclear Legacy Advisory Forum (NuLeAF) meeting was attended by CoRWM members. PH stated that CoRWM is prepared to support a community when required.

**Agenda Item 5: Presentation – Speaker: Professor Geraldine Thomas - “*Health effects of radiation*”**

40. GT presented about health effects of radiation focussing on the fiction surrounding radiation and the problems faced when trying to make the science accessible.
41. Research into specific health effects relating to the Chernobyl and Fukushima nuclear incidents were compared. The largest health effect was identified in the UNSCEAR reports as being on public mental health.
42. GT explained health risks associated with exposure to elements such as Uranium and the other actinides. It was noted that the biggest health risk lies with chemical toxicity and not radioactivity. Radioactivity in the environment was discussed and health risks in perspective to other harmful activities such as smoking were shown.

**Agenda Item 6: Questions from the public**

43. Petratjitske Kalshoven (PK) asked about the communication of radiation and health effects. PK stated that while this presentation gives the impression that radiation is not a big deal there is lots of information available to show the opposite leading to fear in some communities.
44. GT stated that she understands the environment and information an individual is exposed to will affect what they believe. The scientific evidence, from 75 years following the A-bombs in Japan and 34 years post the Chernobyl accident, shows that radiation at low doses provides little risk to human health, especially when put into context with other risks to health from smoking, alcohol and obesity. By their nature, determination of the health effects attributable to low dose radiation require long periods of carefully conducted scientific study.



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This results in a period of time during which alternative ideas, which may lack appropriate scientific methodology and evidence can be presented to the public.

45. PK asked if the high security, surrounding radioactive waste is 'window dressing' by government.
46. GT clarified that, in terms of attributable health effects, radiation at low doses is not a major health concern. However, the fear of radiation has been shown to have an effect on psychological health, which may lead to physical consequences.
47. MK mentioned safe management of radioactive materials and the fact in a well-engineered GDF, radioactive waste will not affect the public.

**Agenda Item 7: Any other business**

**Agenda Item 8: Next Meeting:** 24<sup>th</sup> November, Edinburgh (TBC)



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### Appendix A: Abbreviations

BEIS	Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
CoRWM	Committee on Radioactive Waste Management
WWC	Working With Communities
RWM	Radioactive Waste Management
GDF	Geological Disposal Facility
NPS	National Policy Statement
SG	Scottish Government
WG	Welsh Government
EA	Environment Agency
NDA	Nuclear Decommissioning Authority
ONR	Office for Nuclear Regulation
NSD	Near Surface Disposal
HAWSSIG	Higher Activity Waste Scottish Strategy Implementation Group
NIAUK	Nuclear Industry Association UK
SEPA	Scottish Environment Protection Agency
AGR	Advanced Gas-cooled Reactor
LLWR	Low Level Waste Repository Ltd
R&D	Research and Development
IAEA	Inter Atomic Energy Agency