

COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – SPECIAL MEETING

TUESDAY 26 FEBRUARY 2002 AT 2.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor Ellis (Chairman), Councillors Boaden, Mrs Crookdake (as substitute for Councillor J Mallinson), Mrs Fisher, Knapton, McMillan, Mrs Southward (as substitute for Councillor Weber) and Toole.

ALSO

PRESENT: Councillor Jefferson attended the meeting as an observer.

Dr Martin Curtis OBE, consultant in the field of Radioactive Waste Management and a member of the Government's independent advisory body, the Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee (RWMAC) was present at the meeting.

COS.40/02 WELCOME

The Chairman welcomed all those present to the meeting.

COS.41/02 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors J Mallinson and Weber.

COS.42/02 AGENDA

Pursuant to Minute COS.35/02, the Chairman indicated that the Carlisle Crime and Disorder Audit Summary 1999/2001 would be considered as a matter of urgency in view of the need to progress the matter prior to the next meeting of the Committee.

COS.43/02 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations affecting any item on the Agenda.

COS.44/02 ASPECTS OF "MANAGING RADIOACTIVE WASTE SAFELY"

The Overview and Scrutiny Support Officer submitted report TC.43/02 providing a brief background to the Government's consultation document entitled "Managing Radioactive Waste Safely: Proposals for developing a policy for managing solid radioactive waste in the UK".

That consultation would be the start of a staged process which would end in 2007 with the selection of an option for the long-term management of radioactive waste and the passing of any necessary legislation. The purpose of the consultation was, therefore, to gather views on the Government's plans for the process by which the final policy should be decided upon.

Although Carlisle did not have a direct role in radioactive waste management, waste did routinely pass through the City on its way to Sellafield, and Carlisle could be affected by any serious incident at that site.

The Overview and Scrutiny Support Officer suggested that, given the limited time available in which to develop a response (the consultation period for the document ending on 12 March 2002), the Committee focus on the following aspects:

- The process for the siting of any waste facility;
- The role of Local Authorities in the policy development process; and
- The storage arrangements for radioactive waste at Sellafield.

He outlined each of the above areas in turn and provided details of the relevant key issues.

The Chairman introduced Dr Courtis to Members and welcomed him to the meeting.

Dr Courtis stressed that, although he was a member of the Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee (RWMAC), he was here today in a personal capacity and would therefore be putting forward his own views and not necessarily those of RWMAC.

Dr Courtis responded to Members' questions as follows:

The aim of the consultation exercise was to start a process which would ultimately lead to the implementation of a Radioactive Waste Management Policy which earned broad public support. To that end all options should be examined and the Government was not in favour of any one single solution. The "decide, announce and defend" approach would not be defensible in future.

Certain issues e.g. the siting of a nuclear facility had the capacity to evoke great public concern which was why RWMAC had recommended a three stage process to include the public as a whole. The criteria upon which such decisions were based must be agreed in an open forum in order that people could understand where they were coming from. Additionally, before siting commenced, the wider context should be examined including issues such as the power for local communities to veto any proposals and the payment of compensation to areas hosting nuclear facilities. In line with the practice in other countries, it may be worthwhile seeking volunteer communities to act as hosts and thereafter investigate the suitability or otherwise of those areas. In addition, should a 100% guaranteed safe solution for the disposal of waste be identified in the future, would there be a case for that to be adopted on an international basis?

Clearly this was an extremely complex issue and educating the public would be a major task. A balanced output of information must therefore be provided in order that people could make as informed a judgement as possible. Focus Groups, Citizens Panels, etc could be used to address deficiencies in knowledge.

Dr Courtis stated that a list of potential sites had not been drawn up and he was not aware of who would prepare such a list. RWMAC suggested that a 150 year minimum container lifetime should be looked at until a long-term solution could be found. Dr Courtis did not personally believe that Sellafield would be selected in the long-term, bearing in mind the Secretary of State's decision in March 1997 not to give the Nuclear Industry Radioactive Waste Management Executive (Nirex) planning permission for a Rock Characterisation Facility, and the geology of the area. However, interim storage on the site was a possibility since waste was already there, some of which dated back to the 1950s and 1960s.

Dr Courtis felt that Nirex had a long way to go if it was to regain credibility with the public. The Government had announced the creation of a new body responsible for the management of publicly funded civil nuclear liabilities, including decommissioning and the associated radioactive wastes, and therefore Nirex may not exist in future.

Local Authorities should voice the opinion of the total population in a constructive manner and as loudly as possible at a local, county and regional level, subject to the proviso that radioactive waste was nationally generated material and must be dealt with. Issues including the power of veto over any proposals, compensation and volunteering to host nuclear facilities should also be raised. It should be noted that the Planning Green Paper would impinge on the issue, particularly with regard to the role of the Secretary of State, the granting of planning permission for the storage of waste and policy implementation and Local Government may wish to express concern in that regard.

Liquid High Level Waste (HLW) was very dangerous at a local level and ideally should be treated as quickly as possible but, because of the problems with the Waste Vitrification Plant at Sellafield, only a small amount had been processed. Dr Courtis felt that the timetable for reprocessing was optimistic and may slip. The majority of Low Level Waste (LLW) was stored at Drigg in a satisfactory manner.

With regard to storage, there were degrees of safety. The Nuclear Installations Inspectorate (NII) set passive storage conditions and RWMAC's recommendation was to go with that as soon as possible. However, care required to be taken to ensure that the processing and storage of waste did not prejudice future management options. Dr Courtis did not believe that indefinite storage was sustainable since that would merely be passing the problem on to future generations. It was impossible to foresee a system of constitutional control spanning tens of thousands of years without looking at disposal which did not require intervention.

The buildings at Sellafield had not been designed with a terrorist attack in mind and the structural integrity of the older buildings on the site gave cause for concern. Dr Courtis stressed that he was not an expert on this point, but it was possible that should a commercial aircraft crash onto Sellafield the resultant fires would result in the release of a plume of radioactivity.

With regard to future nuclear programmes, Dr Courtis felt that it was a political issue as to whether or not reprocessing continued.

In conclusion, Dr Courtis requested sight of any report which may be prepared prior to publication of the same and that was agreed.

On behalf of the City Council and the Committee the Chairman thanked Dr Courtis for his attendance and participation in what had been a most informative discussion.

The Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy suggested that the way forward may be for the

Overview and Scrutiny Support Officer to produce a report for approval by the Chairman of this Committee and submission to the Executive, and Members confirmed their acceptance with that course of action.

RESOLVED – That the Overview and Scrutiny Support Officer be requested to produce a report for approval by the Chairman of this Committee prior to submission to the Executive.

COS.45/02 CARLISLE CRIME AND DISORDER AUDIT SUMMARY 1999/2001

Pursuant to Minute COS.35/02, the Community Safety Co-ordinator presented the Carlisle Crime and Disorder Audit Summary 1999/2001.

The Community Safety Co-ordinator provided a history to the matter, commenting that the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 required Local Authorities to work in partnership with the Police and other agencies to set targets to reduce crime and disorder in the District. That meant working to a Strategy which was set every three years and was informed by an Audit also carried out on a three yearly basis.

In addition, in April 2001 it had been decided that the Carlisle and Eden Districts had many common themes and priorities with regard to crime and disorder which led to extensive joint working and would result in a joint Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy for Carlisle and Eden.

The Audit had been compiled following extensive information sharing between key agencies and further analysis of the same. Certain of the data had been mapped to identify hotspots or problem areas and technology would soon be available to continuously update that process over the life of the Strategy.

The Community Safety Co-ordinator commented that it was important to place the Audit in context with some of the achievements over the last three years as well as comparing it at a national level, and gave examples. He added that the key themes which had emerged through consultation with partners included quality of life, violent crime and persistent offending behaviour.

The Community Safety Co-ordinator then responded to Members' questions.

RESOLVED – That the Carlisle Crime and Disorder Audit Summary 1999/2001 be noted and used as part of the Best Value Review when that came back before the Committee.

[The meeting ended at 3.25 pm]