

OPENING THE GATES

*Raising the standard of community liaison
at the Atomic Weapons Establishment*

NIS
Nuclear Information Service

About This Report

In April 2012 Nuclear Information Service completed a two-year study into the work of the Local Liaison Committee (LLC) at the Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE).

Our study was intended as a serious academic investigation, with the aim of benchmarking and promoting good practice.

We found that although members of the LLC take their duties seriously and work hard, it is not reasonable to expect them to take on a mass communication role about issues at AWE sites.

The committee was established in 1993 and has not significantly changed its approach since then.

As a result it now falls short of standards which are adopted elsewhere in the nuclear sector.

This document presents the key findings and executive summary from our study. Please visit our website at nuclearinfo.org to read the full report.



Key Findings

- » The nature of AWE's role in manufacturing and maintaining the UK's nuclear weapons mean that openness, transparency, and communication about AWE's work are sensitive issues. However, security issues present no insuperable barriers to community engagement, and residents living in the areas surrounding AWE have the right to expect the company to meet the same standards of dialogue adopted at other nuclear licensed sites.
- » Operations at AWE have the potential for significant local, regional, and national impact. Whilst members of AWE's Local Liaison Committee take their duties seriously and work hard, it is unrealistic to expect them to play a 'mass media' role in communicating with the public on behalf of AWE about site issues.
- » The AWE Local Liaison Committee was established many years ago on a relatively informal basis, and does not operate according to any formal constitution to define its role and guide its activities.
- » Although AWE is in many respects a leader and an innovator in developing best practice in the nuclear sector, the company is being let down by poor efforts to engage with local communities. Far from setting a lead, the company's Local Liaison Committee fails to meet basic standards for community liaison which are taken for granted at most nuclear licensed sites.
- » Two out of three local residents feel that independent local groups, which currently have no voice on the Local Liaison Committee, should be represented on the Committee. Inclusion of such groups would address a notable shortfall in AWE's current community involvement process.
- » Following the Fukushima nuclear accident, the UK's nuclear regulator has emphasised the need for a drive to ensure more open, transparent and trusted communications and relationships between the nuclear industry and the public and other stakeholders. As part of this drive, the AWE Local Liaison Committee should be reformed to bring it into line with good practice in community engagement.

Executive Summary

This report examines the performance of the Atomic Weapons Establishment's (AWE) Local Liaison Committee (LLC) and compares it with standards of transparency and accountability adopted elsewhere in the UK nuclear industry. It is not a critique of AWE or of defence policy, but a review of the standards of accountability and democracy which AWE applies in its dealings with local people.

The importance of open and honest communication between the nuclear industry and the public has become all the more relevant in light of the Fukushima nuclear accident in Japan, with the Office for Nuclear Regulation (ONR), regulator for the UK's nuclear industry, recommending that the industry considers ways of enhancing the drive to ensure more open, transparent and trusted communications and relationships with the public and other stakeholders in the aftermath of Fukushima. As the Local Liaison Committee is a key means for communication between AWE and local people, it is important that it operates in a way which meets the ONR's aspirations.

Expectations of the role that the Local Liaison Committee plays differ between AWE's stakeholders and have changed over time. Neither AWE nor the Ministry of Defence (MoD) consider that the Committee has any role to play in scrutinising the work of AWE, and Committee members themselves seem unsure as to whether it should play a role in holding AWE to account. Similar committees at civil nuclear sites act as informal watchdogs on behalf of local people, holding the site operator to account and challenge where necessary.



Elsewhere in the nuclear sector a more pro-active view is taken on community liaison issues. The Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA), responsible for decommissioning and cleaning up civil nuclear sites, places great importance on public and stakeholder engagement and insists that an effective Site Stakeholder Group (SSG) operates at each of the sites for which it is responsible,

working in accordance with defined standards of openness and transparency which are outlined in a set of guidelines. Research by Nuclear Information Service presented in this study shows that AWE's Local Liaison Committee falls well short of the standards set by the NDA in a number of respects.

Nuclear Information Service reviewed the effectiveness of the AWE Local Liaison Committee by undertaking interviews and survey work with committee members and residents living in the area around AWE sites and by analysis of key documents relating to the Committee. The results of our study are presented in the main report under four headings which represent important elements of the Local Liaison Committee's work:

- » Representation
- » Communication
- » Transparency
- » Governance



For each of these factors the Local Liaison Committee's current performance has been rated against good practice in the sector as represented by the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority Guidance for Site Stakeholder Groups using a 'traffic light' scorecard. In two of these categories (representation and governance) the committee received a red rating, and in two (communication and transparency) an amber rating.

Although AWE is in many respects a leader and an innovator in developing best practice the nuclear sector, the company is being let down by poor efforts to engage with local communities. Far from setting a lead, the company's Local Liaison Committee fails to meet basic standards for community liaison which are taken for granted at most nuclear licensed sites.



The report makes suggestions as to how the work of the Local Liaison Committee could be improved in each of the four areas considered in the study, taking the view that Committee members themselves must take a lead in making any improvements. Although the status of the Atomic Weapons Establishment as a defence nuclear site means that security will always be a sensitive issue, security provides no insuperable barriers to increasing the openness of the Local Liaison Committee's work because the Committee has no mandate to consider classified matters.

The following general recommendations are made in support of ONR's drive to ensure more open, transparent and trusted communications and relationships with the public and other stakeholders in the defence nuclear sector in the aftermath of the Fukushima accident:

- » The **Office for Nuclear Regulation** should publish a mandatory code of practice for the conduct of Local Liaison Committees and Site Stakeholder Groups at nuclear licensed sites. These should be modelled on the NDA's existing guidance for Site Stakeholder Groups. Following the introduction of the code of practice, sites which do not meet the specified standards should have a period of one year to introduce the necessary improvements.



- » The **Atomic Weapons Establishment** should clearly indicate that it wishes to adopt best practice in community engagement and that it will adopt standards which are at least as good as the current NDA guidance for Site Stakeholder Groups. An experienced stakeholder engagement consultant should be engaged to review the existing arrangements and to work with AWE, the committee, and other stakeholders to help in meeting these standards. A firm timetable should be set for reform of the Local Liaison Committee.
- » The **Ministry of Defence** should indicate as departmental policy that it expects the highest standards of stakeholder engagement from operators of defence nuclear sites, and that these standards will be at least as good as those in the civil nuclear industry. It should provide modest funding to support development of the role of local liaison committees at its nuclear sites so that they meet these standards.
- » **Nuclear Information Service** is willing to assist each agency in achieving these recommendations in the light of the knowledge and experience we have gained in undertaking this study and our work on stakeholder engagement in the nuclear industry.

Nuclear Information Service is a not-for-profit, independent information service which works to promote public awareness and debate on nuclear weapons and related safety and environmental issues. See our website at nuclearinfo.org for more information.

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Read the report in full

www.tinyurl.com/awereport

Our website

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