

Terms of Reference of the Unconventional Gas/Oil Extraction Working Group

Background

On the 30th April 2014 Cheshire West and Chester's Executive decided that "an Executive small Cross Party Group be established on a 4:3 basis to consider how the Council will understand the unconventional gas and oil techniques".

A written response from the Chairman to a question from the public outlined further details regarding the establishment of the Working Group. In summary the Working Group will:-

- Establish its terms of reference and agree on its way of working.
- At the Chairman's discretion, invite interested parties to submit evidence to the group.
- Ensure representatives and experts from both sides of the argument are given an opportunity to contribute and question the evidence.
- Ensure the evidence and findings are published for consultation and accuracy.
- Develop from the consultation and findings a series of conclusions and draft policy for consideration.

The Working Group will run independently of the Council's decision making process for determining planning applications. Planning applications made to the Council will not be put on hold, nor will the Local Plan timetable be delayed until such time as the findings of the Working Group are known. The findings will help to inform the approach to be taken through the Local Plan Part Two to inform land allocations and detailed policies in relation to proposals for conventional and unconventional oil and gas extraction.

Purpose

The Cross Party Working Group remit is to advise the Executive on its key findings following an investigation into the issues associated with conventional and unconventional on-shore gas and oil techniques. To identify the main issues, concerns and opportunities that may be associated with oil and gas development in the Borough.

Membership

Membership to the Working Group is limited to seven elected Members allocated on a 4:3 cross party basis. Members have been selected by the Political Groups on the basis of their personal qualities, experience and representative roles.

Cllr Mark Williams – Chairman

Cllr Howard Greenwood

Cllr Keith Board

Cllr Eveleigh Moore Dutton

Cllr Reggie Jones

Cllr Mark Henesy
Cllr Andy Williams.

Membership is representational and as such members may appoint a deputy to attend on their behalf.

Secretariat will be provided by Democratic Services with officer and lead technical support provided by the Growth and Prosperity Directorate.

Role and Operation of the Working Group

Operating in an advisory capacity, the Working Group will follow a Commission of Inquiry model to examine key issues in detail, setting out specific questions, returning an opinion and producing a report with its findings to the Executive. Keynote presentations and evidence on the relevant core topics are to be planned through a series of hearings involving experts, advisors, academics, practitioners and policy makers.

It's critical from the outset to be clear about what is to be investigated at each Inquiry Stage. Key lines of Inquiry are to be set out for each stage, articulating what is to be investigated and agreeing a series of specific questions that the Working Group would seek to have answered with the assistance of expert witnesses.

The working Group will:-

- Operate on the same lines as a Commission of Inquiry.
- Meet on a "Task and Finish" timetable (to be agreed by Executive of the Working Group membership prior to the first Inquiry Stage meeting).
- Report progress to the Executive on a regular basis.
- Produce and submit to the Executive a Report of its Findings.