

EUSP CEO Council

These minutes record the formal proceedings and decisions of the Energy & Utilities Partnership CEO Council.

Venue:	Friends House, 173 Euston Rd, London, ENG, NW1 2AE		
Date:	23 June 2026		
Time:	13:00-15:30		
Chair:			
Scottish Power		Nicola Connelly	
Council Members Present:			
Anglian Water Group		Nic Fleming	
AUREOS Energy		Phill Price	
Energy & Utility Skills Group		Paul Cox	
M Group		Andrew Findlay (and Co-Chair)	
National Grid		Emma Hardaker-Jones	
		John Tyler	
Northern Gas Networks		Claire Allcock	
Northern Powergrid		Jodie Coe	
		Steve McDonald	
Northumbrian Water Group		Elouise Leonard-Cross	
Prysmian		Raymond Petrus	
Rullion		James Saoulli	
Siemens Energy		Steve Jones	
SSE		Nicki Hussain	
The Clancy Group		Matthew Cannon	
UK Power Networks		Andrew Pace	
VGC Group		Ciara Pryce	
Present:			
Energy & Utility Skills Group		Lisa Spindler (Minutes)	
Energy & Environment Awards		Rachel Thomas	
Energy & Utility Skills Group		Steve Barrett	
Quorum:			
A quorum for decisions shall be 30% (8) of members, including the Chair or a minimum of one Co-Chair.			
Total Council Members		27	
Member Attendees		15 (56%)	
Meeting Quorate		Yes	

No:	Agenda item:
1	Welcome and Introductions Nicola Connelly welcomed members to the meeting and confirmed that, due to a prior commitment in Glasgow, she would chair the meeting remotely, with Paul Cox supporting proceedings in the room. Council welcomed new members Raymond Petrus (Prysmian), James Saoulli (Rullion) and Emma Hardaker-Jones (National Grid). It was also noted that Darren Elsom (SGN) would join the Council from the December meeting. The Chair noted that, despite the extreme heat and travel disruption affecting some members, the meeting remained quorate and proceeded in accordance with the Terms of Reference. Following discussion at the previous meeting, Council agreed to strengthen governance arrangements where organisations are represented by a nominated senior delegate rather than the Chief Executive. Formal delegated authority will be sought from the relevant Chief Executive to ensure appropriate decision-making authority is in place. The Chair also encouraged continuity of attendance wherever possible, recognising that Council's focus is evolving to include strategy, impact and policy, and that consistent representation will support effective governance and momentum. Action: Paul Cox to obtain and record formal delegated authority for all regular non-Chief Executive representatives in advance of the December 2026 meeting. Action: Members to seek continuity of Council attendance so that the same representative attends wherever possible.
2	Delivery Board, Skills Strategy delivery and impact updates – Receive Council received an update from the Delivery Board on progress since the approval and launch of the 2025 to 2030 Skills Strategy in October 2025.

For the benefit of new members, the governance role of the Delivery Board was explained as being across all EUSP network groups, including the National Skills Academy for Power, National Skills Academy for Gas, Water Skills & Competence Steering Group, and other specialist competency groups.

Council noted strong progress across all four Skills Strategy pillars and welcomed the continued shift from delivery activity towards measurable impact. Members recognised the breadth of work supporting implementation, including an extensive programme of research, sector engagement and workforce development activity.

Research was recognised as a key strategic enabler of the Partnership's work. Close to 20 research reports are planned, or in development during the current programme period, spanning transmission networks, water and the supply chain. Council also noted publication of the Inclusion Measurement Framework in April and welcomed its early use in supporting continuous improvement initiatives, government engagement and evidence based policy discussions.

Council welcomed progress across several strategic programmes, including Destination Energy, Energy & Utility Careers and Jobs, the continued development of occupational profiles and routes to competence, and the early success of the Sector Entry model. Members noted the positive outcomes from both the M Group and National Grid supply chain pilots. Emerging work on candidate care and candidate referral was also noted.

Council considered the emerging approach to the 2026 to 2032 workforce demand estimates, recognising the significant demographic shift facing the UK workforce in the years ahead and the importance of widening participation across all available labour pools, including unemployed people, economically inactive people, career changers, the Armed Forces community and young people not currently in education, employment or training. Members recognised this as both a workforce imperative and an opportunity to deliver wider social value.

Members also considered the implications of AI and automation for future workforce demand. Council noted that the forthcoming workforce demand estimates will incorporate productivity sensitivities while recognising that many safety critical operational roles will continue to be required. While technology is

	expected to reshape how many roles are performed, Members agreed that it will increasingly augment rather than replace skilled operational workers. Council reaffirmed the importance of promoting non-degree career pathways, noting that the current workforce demand estimates indicate that more than half of future workforce requirements relate to roles that do not require a degree. Members recognised this as an important opportunity to strengthen social mobility, broaden access to the sector and reinforce evidence based engagement with government. Council also discussed whether employer investment in workforce development is currently under-reported within national statistics. Members recognised that competence development, mentoring, safety training, work based learning and training delivered through major infrastructure programmes may not be fully reflected within conventional measures of employer investment. Council agreed that strengthening the evidence base could support future engagement with governments, provided any approach remained proportionate and avoided unnecessary reporting burdens. The Chair welcomed the strong progress made since the launch of the Skills Strategy and thanked the Delivery Board for its leadership and continued focus on delivering measurable impact.
3	AI and digital partnership Council received an update on the planned AI and digital partnership, the two associated solutions and the current pilot activity. Council noted that this work supports delivery of the Skills Strategy and has been developed in direct response to the priorities agreed by CEO Council in December 2025 to strengthen AI capability, optimise apprenticeship levy utilisation and support workforce development across the sector. The planned approach combines AI and digital workforce development with the potential to harness unspent apprenticeship levy funding through collaborative levy transfer arrangements, enabling support for member organisations, the wider supply chain and, where funding cannot be utilised directly by the sector, broader social value outcomes.

Council welcomed the early progress of the pilot, noting the strong internal interest demonstrated within Clancy following launch and its practical focus on equipping colleagues to identify opportunities for AI-enabled improvement, redesign business processes and embed organisational change. Members also welcomed the emphasis placed on measuring business impact throughout the programme and recognised the value of sharing learning from the pilot where commercial confidentiality permits.

Members recognised the pilot as a positive demonstration of how practical, sector-led solutions can accelerate AI capability within the existing policy framework. Energy & Utility Skills Group highlighted the opportunity for members to adopt a systems level approach to improving levy utilisation, recognising that greater collaboration could strengthen AI and digital capability across the sector whilst demonstrating a shared commitment to impact that would be viewed positively by governments and regulators. Members recognised the value of the planned partnership and welcomed the practical solutions developed in response to previous CEO Council discussions.

While several Members expressed a strong interest in participating in the pilot and exploring greater collaboration on levy utilisation, others considered that the discussion highlighted a more fundamental issue: the need for wider reform of the apprenticeship levy itself. Council recognised that both strands of activity were complementary and that practical sector-led solutions and national policy reform should progress in parallel.

While recognising the value of the Partnership's planned solutions, several Members expressed concern that the current apprenticeship levy does not adequately reflect the needs of their organisation. Members highlighted particular challenges around competence-led occupations and operational flexibility, with some organisations increasingly adopting trainee models where apprenticeship structures do not align with business requirements.

Council agreed that future apprenticeship policy should better reflect the requirements of infrastructure sectors, particularly where safety critical operational roles must be developed at scale. Members recognised the importance of greater flexibility in the use of levy funding to support quicker routes to competence where these better reflect operational requirements.

	Members also noted the increasing complexity created by devolved funding arrangements and regional funding mechanisms for organisations operating across multiple nations and regions. Council acknowledged that competence based and safety critical sectors depend upon experienced workers to develop and support new entrants, and that future workforce capacity will be influenced not only by recruitment but also by the availability of mentors, trainers and assessors. Council welcomed the recent announcement that Skills England had been commissioned by the Skills Minister to review apprenticeship funding bands, recognising this as a timely opportunity to contribute evidence from the energy and utilities sector. The Chair thanked Tony Hobbs of Baltic Apprenticeships for his contribution, confirmed the agreed actions and advised that the wider apprenticeship policy discussion would continue following the networking break. Action: Steve Barrett and Rachel Thomas to coordinate the Energy & Utility Skills Group and Energy & Environment Awards responses to the Skills England apprenticeship funding band review. Action: Members agreed to: 1. Review their apprenticeship levy position. 2. Consider whether they are willing to confidentially share levy utilisation information with Energy & Utility Skills Group. 3. Consider direct engagement with Baltic Apprenticeships where there is interest in the solutions outlined in the meeting.
4	Prioritisation for impact Council considered the proposed Skills Strategy 2025 to 2030: Year 2 Prioritisation for Impact (2026 to 2027) structure, recognising that it represented a significant evolution in how the Partnership would focus, coordinate and measure delivery over the remainder of the current strategic period. Members noted that the structure had been developed collaboratively by the Council Co-Chairs, Delivery Board and Energy & Utility Skills Group in response

to feedback from the December 2025 CEO Council meeting that requested greater prioritisation, clearer alignment and an increasingly strong focus on measurable impact.

The structure proposed a new operating model built around three complementary elements: EUSG Baseline Deliverables, EUSP Continuous Improvement priorities and UK-wide Policy and System Priorities. Council recognised this as a positive development that had the potential to strengthen alignment between the Partnership, Delivery Board, Network Groups and Energy & Utility Skills Group.

Building on the previous agenda item, Members considered whether the proposed UK-wide policy priorities sufficiently reflected the discussion on apprenticeship reform. Whilst recognising the national imperative to improve outcomes for young people, Members cautioned against an overcorrection in policy that focused too narrowly on 16 to 24 year olds.

Council noted that infrastructure employers also require mature entrants capable of operating safely within competence based environments. Energy & Utility Skills Group advised that this aligned with its existing engagement with government, where it had consistently highlighted the 21 to 24 age group as representing the greatest opportunity to address economic inactivity whilst meeting the sector's workforce requirements.

Members discussed the need for government to recognise that the current apprenticeship model does not work equally for all parts of the sector. Some organisations are moving away from employer-provider or Ofsted-accredited models and are using trainee models because the apprenticeship structure does not meet operational need.

Council agreed that apprenticeship funding, levy utilisation, funding flexibility, priority age ranges and simplified access should be more explicitly reflected within UK6, ensuring that the Partnership's future policy position accurately represented the discussion and priorities of Members.

Council discussed the overall scale and deliverability of the proposed priorities, and whether the capability and capacity existed to deliver the plans as outlined. It was noted that a number of priorities are already underway or form part of a rolling programme of work. Members recognised that the structure provides

greater clarity of purpose and accountability than previous approaches. The discussion emphasised the importance of maintaining focus on delivery and measurable impact, ensuring that priorities remained achievable within available Group and partnership capacity.

Members questioned whether current national measures accurately reflect employer investment in workforce development within competence based and safety critical sectors. Council observed that mentoring, supervision, competence development, work based learning and capability building delivered through major infrastructure programmes may not be recognised as formal training despite representing significant employer investment. While Members recognised the potential value of strengthening the sector evidence base, Council concluded that this was not a priority for Year 2 of its Skills Strategy.

Council further discussed wider policy priorities, including the increasing complexity created by devolved adult skills arrangements for national employers and the importance of ensuring future policy positions remain relevant across changing political and governmental contexts.

Members also discussed the need to be prepared for political change and possible election timing. Council agreed that policy positions should be ready and in 'the back pocket' given the current political uncertainty.

Members welcomed the structure as a significant step forward in the maturity of the Partnership. Council agreed that the new approach would provide clearer strategic focus, strengthen accountability and create a more coherent basis for delivery, policy development and engagement with governments across the UK.

Decision: The prioritisation structure was approved subject to refinements discussed in the meeting, including clearer wording relating to apprenticeship levy reform, funding mechanisms and mentor capacity.

Action: Steve Barrett and Delivery Board to operationalise the approved prioritisation structure through Delivery Board, network groups and terms of reference.

Action: Paul Cox to lead the preparation of EUSP CEO Council approved policy positions so that Council and the wider partnership is ready for potential political change.

5
Candidate Care Charter

Council considered the proposed Candidate Care Charter, developed through member network groups to promote a consistent and positive experience for individuals seeking to enter the sector.

Council noted that feedback received through the recent engagement and testing period for the potential sector platform showed strong support for the principle of a Candidate Care Charter, with 98% of respondents identifying it as a positive partnership feature. It was also noted that, if approved, the Charter could be incorporated into the specification for the planned ITT to be issued in August.

Members recognised the importance of providing a positive candidate experience but questioned whether a formal charter would deliver sufficient value or address the sector's most significant workforce challenges. Many members already follow and adopt good recruitment practices and several members reported strong candidate attraction and offer acceptance rates within their own organisations, identifying first year retention rather than recruitment as the more pressing priority.

Council also recognised the practical challenges associated with significantly increasing application volumes, including those generated through AI-enabled applications, and agreed that consistent candidate care expectations must remain proportionate, repeatable and achievable.

Members further noted that any future Charter would require clear governance, monitoring and accountability arrangements if it were to provide meaningful value.

Decision: Council did not approve the Candidate Care Charter and agreed that further work should be undertaken before any revised proposal is brought back for consideration.

6	AOB and close Paul Cox reminded the Council that nominations are now open for the new Utility Week Rising Star Awards, which include dedicated categories for energy, water and supply chain. The Council was encouraged to promote the awards within their organisations to recognise and celebrate emerging talent across the sector. Action: Council Members to promote the Utility Week Rising Star Awards internally, across energy, water and supply chain categories. There being no further business, the Chair thanked members for their attendance and contributions and closed the meeting.
---	---