

PAG meeting minutes – 23 September 2020

Attendees

Duncan Potts (DP)	PWSCG Chair
Denise Harker (DH)	Independent Member
David Gibbs (DG)	Civil Aviation Authority
Tammy Newey (TN)	Maritime and Coastguard Agency
Mark Vartan (MV)	Ministry of Defence
Sarah Davies (SD)	PWSCG Secretariat (BEIS)
Eli Johnson (EJ)	PWSCG Secretariat (BEIS)
Ian Cameron (IC)	Met Office
Derrick Ryall (DR)	Met Office
Richard Orrell (RO)	Met Office
Alison Wood (AW)	Met Office
Angela Fenton (AF)	Met Office
Andrew McKean (AM)	Met Office
Aileen Semple (AS)	Met Office
Mark Hunt (MH)	Met Office
Phil Ellis (PE)	Met Office
Simon Vrji (SV)	Met Office
Patrick Sachon (PS)	Met Office

Apologies

Paul Riches (PR)	PWSCG Secretariat (BEIS)
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Meeting actions

ACTION 1: AS to see if there is an international commitments indicator table for this year to share.	AS
ACTION 2: Met Office to prepare summary of what was achieved in international commitments and top-level objectives.	RO, AS
ACTION 3: SD to add changes in personnel changes to risk register.	SD
ACTION 4: PE to provide update on data standards and integrity once the processes are designed.	PE
ACTION 5: SD to add additional CSA meeting to calendar.	SD

1. In-camera session, AM

In-camera session (No Met Office staff present)

Notes in full version.

2. Welcome and introductions

Following the in-camera session, MO attendees joined the group. DP welcomed everyone to the meeting.

3. Comprehensive spending review (CSR) update and development of new customer supplier agreement (CSA)

SD stated that lots of work had been done over the summer to put in the bid for Met Office and PWS as part of the CSR. Has now gone into BEIS and the BEIS bid is due to go to treasury on 24th September (as understood at the time of the meeting). Cautiously optimistic on PWS, but nothing confirmed. No date for when spending allocation will be announced yet. DR agreed that it was a team effort, and that his main concern is for the HPC; can SD shed light on whether treasury can push back on HCP funding although it has already been approved by treasury? SR could not confirm whether there was likely to be pushback on that item. IC felt confident regarding the ongoing discussion with treasury and the size of package that is being negotiated, although agreed that things may change. The final stages of committing to supplier were due to take place over the next 6-9 months.

SD provided a CSA update. Over summer SD looked through old reports on PWS side and spoke to all CG members, PR spoke to Broadcasters. SD has pulled together an outline of new CSA. This is a whole refresh of CSA, with PWSCG developing a more structured outcome focussed document with much tighter metrics than previous versions. From the consultation, the main points include accuracy: both when it matters (warnings) and day-to-day accuracy which builds trust in the service. Extreme temperature and rainfall were big factors, and ease of access to information was highlighted as important. It will be a big piece of work over next 3-4 months with close collaboration between PWSCG and Met Office throughout. Outline planned for 14th October PWSCG meeting to allow comments on broad themes for PWSCG, with more detailed development of metrics and milestones to be developed to be discussed at the January PWSCG meeting, following an extraordinary PAG in late November/December. IC highlighted that in the past there has been a disconnect between setting the budget and agreeing milestones for the year, can milestones be shared prior to February to tie them into budget? SD agreed that this is important, and that the milestones will be developed in time for the January PWSCG meeting, which will give time for these to be tied into budgets ahead of final sign off at the April PWSCG meeting

RO asked if accuracy discussed during the consultation referred the pull-through side (i.e. how we pass it on to the public/responders), with SD agreeing that it was the perceived accuracy of information the public are receiving rather than measured accuracy of metrics, although this is also important. DR agreed that this accuracy was highly important but wanted some expansion on the ease-of-access discussed in consultancy, does it refer to inconsistency between mediums (i.e. apps vs website)? SD confirmed that it was the ability to access what you want when you need it, in one place. For example, currently if you want a beach forecast you need to know that you can only get it on the web, not the app. TN emphasised that from marine/coastal side of things people want to find out easily about wave height, beach forecast. People do not tend to check beach conditions via the web prior to going which creates a safety issue, but location information is intelligent via an app and thus would be more effective. DR agreed that the issues highlighted were problematic and the Met Office were keen to improve these. DP added that we also need to focus on reach since majority of people no longer use traditional methods to access, with DR also in agreement.

DH asked if there is there a danger that the Met Office will move away from providing high quality content and focus on data supply, following the American model? IC stated that while the Met Office are producers and providers of that data, the Met Office needs to provide extra services too. Following an American model of 'data only' is not where the Met Office is aiming. Although the aim is to provide the best data in the world, their job is to also provide the expertise and content.

4. PWS finances

AM presented the PWS financial information, with AF also present to support the discussion.

On slide number 3, DP highlighted the amount of deferred revenue and stated that we need to be wary of deferred revenue. AM agreed, adding that it needs to be managed appropriately. DH was

concerned that some timelines on cost flexibility were underestimating how long processes such as staff reduction would take and asked whether a 2-year timeline might be more appropriate. AM and the Met Office felt that after discussing the combination of rapid and slower changes a one-year estimate was appropriate.

DH was also concerned that for the PWS FY 20/21 budget pressures deferred income was used to cover payroll, which implies that 2020 budget does not cover costs. Difficult to move forward in this way. AM stated that if COVID-19 continues to impact finances, at worst we would have to review non-consolidated pay. DP added there were savings imposed in 2015 after a reduction in headcount up until 2018; headcount has now regrown significantly which will impact budget, with DH adding that after expensive headcount reduction it is slightly worrying that headcount may be creeping up again. AM explained that a lot of the headcount growth is paid for by external funding/revenue and specific projects. The result of cuts in meteorology network meant that rosters could not be filled, and Met Office was finding it difficult to meet MOD requirements. MOD funding enabled Met Office to increase headcount, which was specifically funded. DH have those people been brought in on specific contracts for those projects, or staff contracts? AM believed that these were fixed terms contracts generally but did not have the exact details to hand.

5. International commitments

AS to present international commitments slides.

DP asked whether EUMETNET is a non-political/governmental commitment and were there other non-EU countries involved. AS replied that it is not political. Norway, Switzerland, Iceland, and a few other eastern Europe non-EU countries also take part.

MV asked whether the UK will have access to Copernicus, and how the discussions were going? AS stated, that the output will still be available to the UK since it is free at the point of use. Discussions are ongoing. ECMWF perform a lot of work on Copernicus, so if they are unable to run and perform those from the UK, they may see loss of revenue. But data should be unaffected. IC added that they do not currently know what will happen with Copernicus but will keep members briefed when details are known. SD stated that a bid is being submitted on 1st October to host the EU activities for ECMWF, legally we can host them but there is competition. IC we also have other specific international relations, but we may end up with outputs on some projects without having any input into what is done.

DG asked whether the international commitments indicator table that used to be presented is available. AS was going to see if this is available.

ACTION 1: AS to see if there is an international commitments indicator table for this year to share.

DP the international work is an important part of PWS, can we have something in there for CSA? SD yes already on the case for this to determine new measurable indicators. RO added that 18/19 CSA may provide an example of how the international metrics can be defined up front. SD asked if we could sign off PPM6 for this year based on what we have this year? AW although outputs have been valuable there were no pre-agreed objectives that we can reconcile.

ACTION 2: Met Office to prepare summary of what was achieved in international commitments and top-level objectives in order for the PAG to sign off

6. High performance computing

MH presented an update on the HPC.

MV wanted clarification on the resilience of multi-node setup, i.e. if one node goes down how does this impact operations? Will UK based systems work properly if non-UK based systems go down? MH

confirmed that work is spread across multiple nodes to give system resilience and disaster recovery processes. All tenders are proposing this design and a significant improvement on current design. All nodes are geographically diverse, whereas currently they are not. Resilience within the systems themselves are also substantially improved over the current setup. The direct operational output will be based in the UK, and this is an essential part of the agreement with central government. The UK based systems can operate independently if non-UK based systems go down.

DH stated that this is huge piece of work, and associated risks also large. Important to make sure what we get out of it in terms of accuracy and service improvements to help the key missions for the PWS are delivered. MH agreed, stating that investment will be done in line with other strategic investments to enable each other. Supercomputer increases capability, but we also need to get scientific innovation out into the hands of our users and that's where strategic innovations come in line with this. The combination of strategic innovation improves service. IC also stated that Government stakeholders have signed up to significant improvements on services, but the exact use of this new capability has yet to be finalised, with PWS to be involved in these decisions. DR added that the supercomputer will improve overall forecast ability, but the challenge is ensuring that the pull through into product output reflects this. The improvement in service needs to be clear to consumers, which has not always happened in the past.

7. Strategic actions (Data) updates

PE, PS and SV presented strategic actions (data) updates.

DH queried whether previous legacy issues sorted out via the T&E programme? PE said that T&E began the journey but realised that until capabilities are improved the import of legacies was too big. The update described in the presentation allows us to move T&E to the next level.

MV was concerned that areas of data pooled via users are identifiable in user location. PE said that data can be pooled over wider areas and whole globe if necessary. PE added that many of the defence services will not be in the public domain at all and data will be moved to thundercloud for example.

DG asked for clarification on data standards and how integrity of data will be maintained throughout the stages. PE we are building in data verification stages at every step of the way into the new systems. Full design not finalised but will provide an update on this once it is.

ACTION 3: PE to provide update on data standards and integrity once the processes are designed.

8. Review of Risk register

SD most risks register items have been discussed during the meeting, does anyone else have additional comments? DH can we add changes in personnel and the risks that that brings to an organisation and how it functions to the register? SD will do this.

ACTION 4: SD to add changes in personnel changes to risk register.

IC also added they are trying to ensure any reorganisation it as smooth and clean as possible. IC recognises the concern that changes in staff pose a risk and offered assurances that the PWSCG is the major client of the organisation and it is important that the PWSCG is informed and feels positively about changes.

DP PWS about reputation and trust and the risk register is useful to ensure that this trust and reputation is maintained. Need to make sure the metrics can accurately measure performance and work out what is important E.g. PPM5. RO stated that PPM5 metric drives a lot of discussion and challenge between science and business. Genuine appetite and desire for metrics to be strengthened and changed. OR happy to do a deep dive into those metrics and highly performing and poorly performing the metrics.

9. AOB / topics for next meeting

DP we need to be proactive about this, CSA should drive focus. The next PAG is normally at beginning of the year, when would everyone like the next one? DP can we have extraordinary ad hoc PAG to discuss CSA in detail? All in agreement that a CSA discussion would be useful. DP thanked all attendees for their time and input.

ACTION 5: SD to add additional CSA meeting to calendar.

10. In-camera session, PM

In-camera session (No Met Office staff present)

Notes in full version.