PUBLIC WEATHER SERVICE CUSTOMER GROUP (PWSCG)

MEETING OF SCOTTISH STAKEHOLDERS

10 am, Thursday 8 December, Marryat Hall, Caird Hall, Dundee

Welcome and Introduction

LS opened the meeting and recapped the last year, noting that it has been a challenging year due to various extreme weather conditions. LS recognised that MO services help the responders and communities to prepare for these events and that there are often unique impacts to Scotland from weather events, such as impact on island supply chains and tourism when ferries do not run. LS stated that the PWS covers the whole of the UK so this group is a really important opportunity for Scottish stakeholders to feed in their unique experiences and views on the services

Role of PWSCG

DP provided a short background to the purpose and remit of the PWSCG and why hearing first hand from users of PWS services in Scotland is so important. DP highlighted the main focus on the work of the group over the last couple of years which included a complete overhaul of the customer supplier agreement which sets out the requirements to be delivered under the PWS to a focus on reach as set out in a new Citizen Engagement Strategy. DP noted that the national severe weather warning service has matured into a well run and dependable service and that the PWSCG are also looking to see improvements in the day to day forecast and associated services.

Met Office update

IB gave an overview of the purpose of the Met Office and the PWS, describing the role that BEIS have in holding the Met Office to account on their performance of PWS deliverables and performance measures. IB explained the current position of the new MO supercomputer and updated the group on the implementation timeline with the new capability to come on stream in the Autumn of 2023. Benefits of the supercomputer upgrade include increased computing capacity which will result in improved granularity of forecasts, accuracy and confidence in models.

Review of Weather

CD provided the group with a comprehensive summary of the main weather events to impact Scotland over the last year to stimulate conversation within the group. CD stated that 2022 was likely to be the warmest year on record, and it was quite a dry year. The group were reminded of the large impacts that Storm Arwen had in Scotland mostly due to the unusual nature of the wind direction (Northerlies/North Easterlies). The wind direction and speed observed during Storm Arwen was unprecedented in the last 50 years of observations. The impacts were widespread, with some

people without power for up to 10 days, and communications impacted as batteries depleted on masts meaning that communities were hard to get in touch with and power companies couldn't communicate with impacted areas. Some communities on the edge of the red region were impacted significantly because resources were stretched across the red area. There has been work to more effectively communicate an understanding of the warning matrix since this storm, including the detail of yellow warnings. Storms Malik and Corrie hit shortly after Arwen, wind was in the prevailing direction and the impacts were not as severe as Arwen within Scotland.

The July 2022 extreme heat event was the first heat warning that impacted Scotland, but it was challenging to link the high temperatures to impacts within Scotland despite Scottish heat record being broken with temp of 34.8C. There has been a high amount of rain in the east coast in particular during Autumn, with a significant rainfall event during the 16-19th November. Flooded roads were the main impact during this event, for this event 88% of those surveyed within the Scottish warning area were aware, and 80% took action, 95% found it useful.

The group discussed whether the public understand the warning matrix, with the Met Office agreeing that there is some confusion with the public around the matrix, but that it is designed more for responders. Information on the likelihood and impact is covered in the warning text instead for the public, but there were concerns within the group that high impact yellows could be ignored because they appear as 'just a yellow' due to low likelihood. The Met Office confirmed that they are undertaking more work to update communication of warnings to the public, but that they would like responders to understand and use the matrix. The group agreed that when there is uncertainty over a warning, particularly a yellow warning, there is huge value in the communications with the civil contingencies advisors that provide detailed explanations and context of the warnings.

Closed feedback session without Met Office

DP opened the discussion for comments from the group more widely around the services, seeking either positive of negative feedback from the group.

There was a discussion on whether one Scottish representative is enough for the PWSCG. DP felt that the impact of membership is more about how articulate and engaged the members are, recognising that the DA reps are generally very engaged and give a lot of feedback. He also said that these meetings help to provide further context and feedback. Scottish Government representatives confirmed that they are content with the arrangement currently. DP also shared that the BEIS Secretariat are undertaking a review of the membership, including whether the 'thrive' element of PWS has enough representatives, so feedback on this is welcome. BEIS agreed to discuss this during the membership review.

Action: BEIS to review DA membership of PWSCG during membership review.

The group agreed that the relationship between attendees and the civil contingencies advisors (CCAs) is extremely valuable. There was agreement that if there is evidence that responders are underplaying an event the CCAs will raise it with them, which demonstrates the strength of the relationships. It was also noted that the forecasts and services are excellent and have seen improvements over time of use. However, they noted that some of the systems can be difficult to navigate for example hazard manager and some of the other premium services.

There was a discussion around challenges where responsibility falls between the Met Office and other agencies. There can be difficulties communicating different warnings, particularly when SEPA

and Met Office warnings do not align for example, so perhaps better overlap and working together could help that. BEIS highlighted that the Met Office are currently undertaking some work with UKHSA on this issue and could have lessons that can apply to SEPA too. The SEPA representative would welcome follow-up from the Met Office on this issue.

Met Office to discuss warnings communications with SEPA.

The BBC representative wanted to understand how they can better provide feedback. BEIS noted that the Media and Reach Group (MARG) is typically where broadcasters typically give feedback. BEIS suggested that it is worth ensuring that there is sufficient DA feedback given during the MARG meetings, either via direct attendance or via pre-meeting feedback shared with the representatives.

BEIS to review DA representation on the MARG e.g. BBC Scotland.

The group also discussed how the Met Office plan to deal with increased warning frequency with increasing severe weather, noting that we should be careful not give too many warnings. BEIS recognised this as in important question and will ask the Met Office for a response to this.

Met Office to provide further detail on whether they have planned how to respond to increased frequency of warnings.

The group discussed whether the Met Office are considering naming weather events beyond wind events, there was mixed feedback on this from the group but may be worth consideration from the Met Office. There was also feedback on the difficulty of pronunciation of some names and the impact that this could have for the public, video guides to pronunciation could be helpful.

BEIS to discuss storm naming with the Met Office and feed back to the group.

DP closed the session by noting that due to budget constraints there will most likely be some tough decisions for PWS spending wise, but by understanding what the most valuable components are for the attendees we can make informed decisions. He recognised that the civil contingencies advisors are clearly invaluable based on feedback during the meeting

Cold Weather Warning Service

LM introduced the next item whereby the Met Office are trying to establish whether an additional cold weather warning service is needed. To make a decision on this they need to understand what additional impacts would be captured by an Extreme Cold Warning, and whether it would help responders with resource planning and communications. It may be that a warning service is not needed, but that more clear communications around cold are needed instead.

The group asked what a warning would look like in terms of information. The Met Office said the current intent was that it would look very similar to extreme heat and would be delivered in a similar way, including likelihood and impacts, information on what to expect and what actions the public can take. The group discussed the complexities around the warning, noting that it was difficult to see what could be done to help the public during a cold warning. They agreed that if the warning was to support vulnerable people then there are other ways of communicating risks, but for the general public it may not be well-received. The BBC representative said that the impacts may be challenging to communicate, and likelihood for confusion if you have multiple competing impacts (ice, snow, fog, rain, wind) is high, and the group asked if the Met Office are the right people to portray this message or should it be a health service which could separate it from the other warnings and avoid

comms whilst helping the vulnerable. Local authority representatives could see benefit of cold warning if there was not snow and ice, but you could risk reducing impacts of warning system if there are too many and the public become saturated. There was a comment that the risks of wind chill are not currently covered well by warnings.

Nowcasting

Nowcasting covers forecasting for short notice, high impact weather. The Met Office now have the scientific capability to forecast high impact convective events, but need to understand how short notice events can be best communicated to the responder communities and media along with the usefulness or risks around these services and short timelines on getting them out. The group said that if they could hear about an event even a couple of hours ahead it would provide benefit, especially with improving geographical location that could be really beneficial in getting word out to the local communities. Text message alert services would be good saying the impact and likelihood along with timescales, and it was agreed that community resilience groups are really key to this service. If you can go direct to the local communities they can stand up much more quickly than responders sometimes. There was also feedback that for short notice events it is important that some comms which is ready to be pushed out to the public is ready immediately to amplify a clear message. The groups would be content for these to be an alert within an existing warning area, providing more clarity and detail on top of the warning.

Network Rail presentation

TC at Network Rail gave a presentation on their use of PWS services. Network Rail have an in-house Meteorology team (Weather Operations Duty Managers – WODM) following recommendations from the Stonehaven incident, with their focus on reducing the impact of weather on the rail network. WODM's recommend mitigations such as speed restrictions. Red warnings now result in cancellations across the region, and this is one of the main uses of PWS information for the service. They gave positive feedback on usability, simplicity of the PWS warning scheme which easily allows resource allocation and regional decisions. They noted challenges around the notice period of warnings being issued and the consistency of these warnings sometimes. Network Rail mentioned that trackside observations rain gauges would be valuable across the railway network and they are currently looking to utilise the Met Office Weather Observations Website (WOW) to access live observations data.

BBC presentation

BBC Scotland do around 40 broadcasts a day for weather, a team of 5 presenting in English and 2 members presenting in Gaelic. They gave feedback that the warning service works well, is easy to understand and easy to communicate, time of issue was the potential only issue sometimes. Controlling the narrative is important for being a trusted source of information and issuing far in advance can be problematic if the event is not as big as anticipated.

Meeting Close

DP thanked attendees for their time and feedback, noting that their input was invaluable to ensure that PWS services worked for all nations across the UK.