Understanding of Warnings

Background
In addition to the National Severe Weather Warning Service (NSWWS), the Met Office currently displays a number of other warning services via its web site. These include flood warnings for Great Britain (in partnership with the Environment Agency, Natural Resources Wales and SEPA) and Heat Health and Cold Weather Alerts (England only) provided under contract with the Department for Health.

With the exception of NSWWS, these services fall outside of the PWS and are based on different business rules, each utilising a different style of presentation. These services are currently accessible from the same page and from a user perspective it can be argued that the three sets of information may not provide an integrated and consistent depiction of an evolving event.

Within this milestone a new set of designs has been developed which provide integrated access through to the NSWWS and flood warning services. Modifications to or integration of the content of the services themselves is outside the scope of this milestone, but discussion at the January ‘14 PWSCG is encouraged to establish whether this is both viewed as a priority for the PWS and the direction of travel.

Update
An initial set of designs were reviewed at the October 2013 PWSCG with further feedback provided post-meeting. The designs were taken to public usability testing on 12th November, observed by the PWSCG Secretariat and the following key themes were identified.

- Users wanted to go to their location page first before looking for warnings
- Users expected severe weather to be flagged in the five day table
- Version 2 of the designs tested best (also preferred by the PWSCG) although some usability issues remained
- The icons and colour scheme were understood, except for the fog icon. Users noted that the icons used for flood warnings were stylistically different from the other icons
- Users did not find the content on the flood warning or the cold weather alert/heat health warnings sufficiently detailed to be of real value; for flood warnings, users preferred the map based display
- Users in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales believed that the label ‘Not issued’ for cold weather alerts meant that it was not cold in those areas
- Users did not understand that you could click through from regional warnings to national page

A number of these points are viewed as significant and a revised set of designs have been created and subsequently peer reviewed by the usability organisation. These new designs include changes to the navigation structure of the site, which also underwent testing, which will make it easier to find content. The placement of advertisements on the site has not been finalised.

In particular the cold weather alerts and heat health warnings have been removed from their current prominent position on the home page based on lack of perceived value and confusion observed through testing.

Regarding access to flood warnings, the preference across Government (as recommended by the Cabinet Office Civil Contingencies Secretariat) is for agencies to use a consistent set of traffic light colours to communicate the severity of impact of an event. This suggests that
further discussion is required about furthering the integration of flood warnings with other warnings, particularly NSWWS. The designs proposed have been developed based on best practice design principles and usability testing but may be improved further based on a broader discussion regarding the priority for PWS to progress the integration of multi-agency warning content. The PWSCG is encouraged to consider how this work could be progressed, and who should be involved.

The designs will work across mobile devices and a draft milestone for FY14/15 recommends that they are applied across the digital channels, following clarification by the PWSCG about the priority of progressing this work.