

## PWSCG Northern Ireland

Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2022, Clarence Court, Belfast

### 1. Welcome and Introductions

GQ welcomed attendees and round table introductions were given.

### 2. Chair of PWSCG Update

DP provided a short background to the purpose and remit of the PWSCG and why hearing first hand from users of PWS services in Northern Ireland 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 area of 'thrive' which looks more at the day to day forecast and associated services.

### 3. Northern Ireland Government Update

GQ provided the group with an oversight of the roles and responsibilities within DfI Rivers. The group were informed about the activities undertaken within the roads and rivers department which includes managing emergency planning activity hence why the services around weather are so important. Following this introductory presentation there was some discussion within the group about how messages around severe weather reach the public in Northern Ireland. KS enquired about how responders access the warnings in N. Ireland. JM spoke about the strong community resilience network and that messages are cascaded by email and text to that community. There are approximately 35 community resilience groups and JM spoke about how they maintain regular contact with these groups which helps ensure messages receive wide circulation. SM spoke about how managing and maintaining relationships matters and that members of the various networks do feed back information. MS from the fire service spoke about their use of news feeds to get information out to the public and JW noted that due to the size of the nation weather stories can have an increased change of making the national news in Northern Ireland. MS informed the group that they were witnessing more people using the App and MO social media updates out and about when managing and dealing with incidents. DP enquired about the surveys the MO conduct and whether the data is available for N. Ireland specifically. LM said the results can be disaggregated that way and will pull out the headline findings for N. Ireland.

**Action: LM to pull out the headline survey results for N. Ireland.**

WL questioned whether responders felt they had to have a warning in place to be able to communicate the potential weather impacts. JM noted that in their emergency preparedness work they would only look to activate messaging and a multi-agency response when a medium impact was expected. MS noted that even with a low likelihood warning it does provide that first stage of building the story and it can help bring people along with you when a weather event does evolve to a higher impact scenario. Members of the group spoke about the importance of the advisors and JW team. They have full trust in the advisors and use their knowledge and expertise to help decide on the appropriateness of messaging to responders and the public.

#### Item 4 Met Office Update

AW provided a short update on Met Office activity informing the group about the work they have been doing on developing the citizen engagement strategy. AW explained the current position with regards to 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. AW summarised some of the wider government activity and initiatives that may impact MO over the next year such as the Cabinet Office Arms Lengths Body review programme.

#### Item 5: Review of weather events

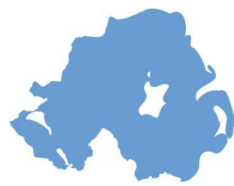
WL provided the group with a comprehensive summary of the main weather events to impact Northern Ireland over the last year to stimulate conversation within the group. The group discussed the heat warning that was issued in the summer, with positive feedback received from stakeholders on the warning. WL noted that it may take a bit of time to fully understand the impacts witnessed and the action taken for extreme heat. The group were reminded of the impacts of two key storms to hit Northern Ireland, storm Dudley and Franklin in February 2022. There was some debate about the use of the matrix and whether everyone found it easily understandable. Whilst it maybe something that isn't used widely by the public in general it was found to be very helpful for the responder community to have the detail on the impact and likelihood of events. In terms of advance notice of events, responder organisations much prefer to be prepared for an event even if that means on occasions having to stand down crews and equipment as that is easier to manage as opposed to standing up a crew at short notice. On getting information around taking action, WL reminded the group that it is possible for the MO to provide additional information within the warning messaging about what action to take. The Met Office are also undertaking some work for the current CSA to review how they communicate warnings and the information included alongside the warning. The Fire service noted that they find the NSWWS to be a very good service and note that there have been continual improvements over time. There was endorsement of the Hazard Manager tool with attendees saying they do make use of it and use it to access additional information. Views were expressed that there is greater use of the App now especially the 6 hour past and forward look. Comments were received on the 3 month outlook which planners found to be helpful in getting that signal about what the general feel for the winter season will be like and that this was especially useful for councils.

#### Item 6: Future Service Requirements

LM summarised the work conducted to date on scoping out the requirements for a possible extreme cold warning. MO were very keen to hear from the group as to the perspective of users in Northern Ireland as there doesn't appear to be a conclusive need from the consultation activity so far. The group asked about information gathered to date and LM informed them of the survey work they currently commission.

**Action: Attendees to consider if they would like to take part in the MO responder panel surveys and to contact LM or via their Advisor if they would like to sign up.**

There was some debate about whether a cold warning would come in at a particular threshold. WL confirmed that like other warnings it would be based on impacts. The group debated what the impacts might be and how this would sit with existing warnings such as ice. On roads it was felt that messaging around snow and ice would probably cover their needs. Other aspects considered included how it might related to triggering winter fuel payments, the increase in fire response call outs as more people light fires, the risk of household water pipes bursting and in the education



setting transport issues can impact keeping the 1200 school estate open. KS spoke about the amplification of the message which might be where the focus needs to be which was supported by the group.

LM introduced her second item on the review of health forecasts specifically relating to pollen, UV and air quality. MS enquired as to the baseline for which any improvement has been seen over time on health outcomes as a result of these services. It was felt that these wouldn't be used in the role of an emergency planner.

#### Stakeholder Presentations

MS provided the group with an informative presentation on the challenge and approach to managing wildfires in Northern Ireland. MS spoke positively of the joined up inter agency response in the province with some advantage stemming from the fact that there are mainly singular agencies operating in Northern Ireland unlike other parts of the UK. The presentation covered the different tactics used to managed and bring wildfire under control noting the work of specialist colleagues using techniques of managed burns to limit overall spread of fires and to bring them to an end. The expertise in these fire teams in in demand in other parts of the UK and the wildfire analysis team we asked to support the response to the fires seen in the south east of England in the summer. They have experienced an increase in call outs to large incidents and thinks the evidence points towards the need for warnings for wildfires.

JM informed the group of the structures and joint approach to ensuring effective cross border comms within the emergency preparedness space. After storm Ophelia, a multi agency protocol for cross border notifications was established for all events. It was noted that collaborative working with Met Eireann has increased and the question was raised as to whether the MO could engage with the multi agency protocol group.

**Action: MO to follow up with JM on opportunities for MO to engage with the work around the multi agency protocol.**