

PUBLIC WEATHER SERVICE CUSTOMER GROUP

Annual Report 2020/2021



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Welcome to this year's Annual Report which provides a flavour of the work and activity undertaken by the Public Weather Service Customer Group in 2020/21.



It has been a year like no other; up and down the country the pandemic has impacted on our lives in an unprecedented way. The impact of COVID-19 has been felt right across society and in the workplace too, which is why after this last year I am particularly proud of all that has been achieved by the Public Weather Service Customer Group. Of course, the task of in delivering the Public Weather Service is a massive collaborative effort and can only be achieved through the hard work and dedication of the Secretariat at BEIS, the Met Office and all the other Government Departments, Devolved Administrations and Agencies that contribute.

Over the last year, the PWSCG has focussed its efforts on forging a new and ambitious Customer Supplier Agreement (CSA). The CSA is the agreement by which the PWSCG, representing Government and the Public Sector, communicates what it requires to be delivered under the Public Weather Service. The new CSA represents a wholesale change with a focus on the 'What' (outputs and outcomes) rather than the 'how' (how the Met Office delivers these). It also covers the next 5 years to establish clarity on a direction of travel, but detailed performance measures will be reviewed and adjusted on an annual basis. I am delighted that the new CSA has been approved by both the PWSCG and Met Office Executive, which reflects the closer working and mutual respect between them. This CSA will have a particular focus on accuracy, not only in respect of severe weather warnings but also in the day to day forecasts that the public has access to.

In other news, the PWSCG welcomed new Members this year, including the appointment of Kim Shillinglaw as the new Independent Member following an open competition last summer. We are now in a very strong position with a dynamic mix of skills and experience within the Group. This should ensure that the delivery of this new ambitious CSA remains on track and serves the needs of the Government, public sector and of course our fellow citizens who rely on these services to stay safe and thrive.

As we move towards better prospects of seeing life return to something more familiar, I am very keen to get out and about to meet with people face to face. No online meeting can quite compare to hearing first hand from people the challenges they face in dealing with what the weather throws at them. I very much look forward to working with you all, wherever you are in the UK, over the coming year.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Simon Lister". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'S'.

What is the PWSCG?

The Public Weather Service Customer Group (PWSCG) acts as the customer on behalf of the Government, responders, and UK citizens for the free-at-the-point-of-use weather services and advice provided by the Public Weather Service (PWS) delivered by the Met Office. It ensures that these services meet the operational needs of public sector users of PWS outputs, and acts as the guardian for the Met Office's underpinning operational capability upon which all UK weather services depend. It is responsible for setting the outputs and monitoring the performance of the Met Office in delivering the PWS.

The responsibilities of the PWSCG are as follows:

- Setting the current and future outputs required from the PWS and specifying its performance indicators and targets;
- Monitoring the performance and delivery of the PWS outputs against the agreed performance indicators and targets, and considering in-period modifications to the PWS as appropriate;
- Reviewing whether Met Office plans for the underpinning capability and international commitments are appropriately prioritised and have a demonstrable, value for money link to support the delivery of PWS outputs and other direct services to Government, the public sector and civil aviation;
- Reviewing the socio-economic benefits delivered by the PWS, commissioning additional research as necessary;
- Supporting cross-Government cooperation to increase the use of PWS outputs and raise issues relevant to wider Government, including through the Chair's representation on Met Office Governance groups;
- Providing independent advice to Government ministers on the PWS as required;
- Consulting widely with the public and the public sector users of the PWS, as appropriate, in order to effectively undertake its responsibilities above.

The PWSCG quickly settled into the rhythm of online meetings, ensuring continuity of service in the role of scrutinising delivery of the PWS on behalf of the Government. Successful and well attended full PWSCG meetings were held in April and October in 2020 and January 2021. The Secretariat convened an extra 'extraordinary' meeting of the PWSCG in December 2020 to provide additional input and scrutiny over the development of the new Customer Supplier Agreement (CSA).

In the summer of 2020, the Secretariat conducted a requirement gathering exercise which involved holding one to one consultation conversations with all PWSCG Members. PWSCG Members were very accommodating with their time and spoke freely and in depth to ensure that the Secretariat could capture in vast detail all of the key components that users of the PWS require from the service. This work allowed for a series of in-depth conversations between the Secretariat, the Chair of the PWSCG and the Met Office PWS Team to come to a consensus on what can be delivered as part of a new CSA.

The Group welcomed new members during the year including the appointment of a new Independent Member, Kim Shillinglaw whose principal responsibility is to represent the voice of the UK general public.

The PWSCG took a keen interest in and focussed on a number of key deliverables during the year:

- Supported the official case for investment in a new Supercomputer for the Met Office with a letter from the Chair of the PWSCG
- Contributed to an in-depth discussion and review of the plans Met Office proposed for introducing an Extreme Heat Warning service in 2021
- Took part in a number of 'deep dive' sessions including a more in depth look at Accuracy and Finance
- Attended a number of Emergency Responder Workshops to input into the review of Warning Services
- Provided direction and steer to MO on the approach to 'Reach' of Met Office outputs and agreed a way forward on the provision of information under the 'Enthusiasts Site'
- The PWSCG Chair and Independent Member attended a number of specific focus meetings to provide a strategic view to the Met Office on challenges around assessing and verifying accuracy, simplifying the approach to tackling 'Reach'

The 20/21 Customer-Supplier Agreement (CSA) between the PWSCG, the Met Office and the Department of Business Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS) aligns the outputs of the PWS into seven themes: the National Severe Weather Warning Service (NSWWS), Services for the Public (with three sub-themes: Direct Reach, Third Party Reach and Products & Content), Services for Civil Contingencies, Data Services, International Commitments, the National Capability¹ and Delivering Efficiencies. In addition to the main PWSCG meetings, there are three PWSCG sub-groups that review and assess performance on specific delivery themes.

The PWS Assurance Group (PAG) continued to scrutinise Met Office performance under the International Commitments and National Capability themes, reviewing the Observations, Science, Technology and International programmes. The group met in September and March this year. The end of year PAG discussed the impacts that COVID-19 had on Met Office observations, forecasts, operations, and international commitments during 20/21. Despite many challenges that arose due to COVID-19, PAG members commended the Met Office on reaching their targets for Observations, Science, Technology and International programmes. The group also looked to the future, discussing the anticipated improvements the IMPROVER project will have on forecast accuracy when it goes live in 2022, and how new machine learning techniques are being implemented to improve a wide range of Met Office products.

The PWS Assurance Group for Reach (PAG-Reach) provide additional scrutiny of the Public Services Theme of the PWS, including Met Office reach, media and campaigns, and content and syndication. The group met in January to coincide with feedback from the Public Perception Survey. The 2020 Public Perception Survey was conducted via phone due to COVID-19, with results showing that there were decreases in reach of direct Met Office Channels during the year but increases in TV viewership and social media engagement kept indirect reach high. The group discussed recent successes in Met Office social media engagement that may appeal to younger members of the public and were informed that the Met Office are entering a busy period for broadcast contract renewals.

The Media and Reach Group (MARG) chaired by the Independent Member met in August 2020 and April 2021. This group brings together members of the broadcasting community that are key to delivering third party reach of public weather service outputs. The MARG looked in depth at issues relating to the performance of weather warnings, storm naming, and communication of the weather during the COVID-19 pandemic. The group also discussed the proposed Extreme Heat Warning service at both meetings. MARG members are supportive of the new service but are cautious about how the new warnings will be communicated to the public. It was agreed that the Met Office and MARG will meet again prior to the launch of the new Extreme Heat Warnings to discuss communication of the warnings, thus ensuring clear communications of the warnings to the public.

¹ This includes the science, observations, forecasts and computing infrastructure that underpin the PWS and all other weather services.

ASSESSMENT OF DELIVERY

The PWSCG meeting held on 28th April 2021 provided the formal sign off decision as to whether the Met Office had met all its obligations as set out in the CSA for 2020/21. Performance was monitored closely throughout the year by the Secretariat and the PWSCG, holding the Met Office to account on all the agreed milestones and metrics.

At this meeting, the group were pleased to confirm that the Met Office had met all the outputs and delivery targets in the CSA for 2020/21.

PRIORITIES FOR 2021/2022

The first part of the year is set to be dominated by the implementation of the new CSA and associated governance procedures. The Met Office and PWSCG will continue to develop metrics for accuracy and reach during 21/22, resulting in a set of clear and accurate metrics that capture current Met Office performance and are able to quantify changes in performance due to the implementation of the IMPROVER project and the new supercomputer.

Another focal point for the year is the launch of the Extreme Heat Warning Service currently scheduled for Summer 2021. Preparations for this launch are ongoing, with a range of partner organisations and broadcast partners collaborating with the Met Office to ensure that the service launches smoothly in the summer.

Finally, although many PWSCG meetings were successfully held online during 20/21, there were no meetings of the Devolved Administration groups this year. Re-establishing these meetings alongside other PWSCG meetings is a priority for 21/22.

THE PUBLIC WEATHER SERVICE IN ACTION

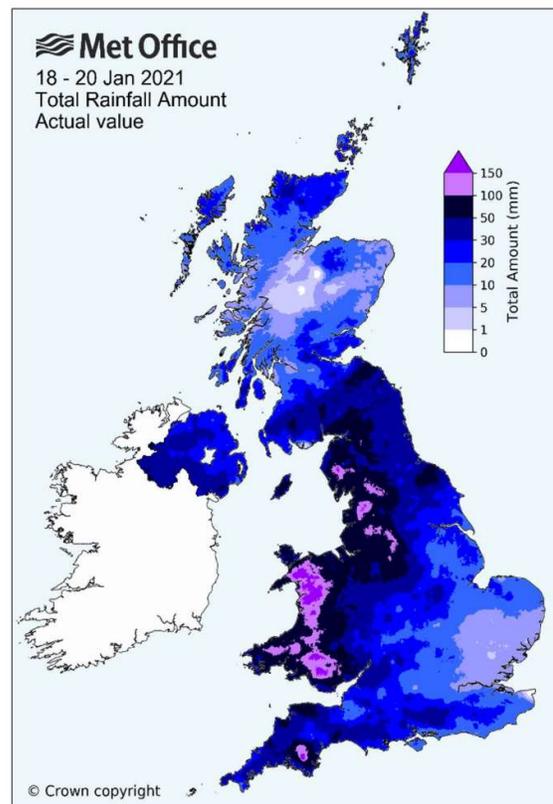


Case Study of Storm Christoph

Storm Christoph brought some exceptionally wet weather to North Wales and northern England from 18 to 20 January. 100mm of rain or more fell across upland areas, and parts of Cheshire, Greater Manchester and Lancashire received around the January whole-month long-term average rainfall from this event. For north-west England and North Wales this was one of the wettest 3-day periods on record. Storm Christoph also brought some strong winds, particularly across eastern England and Scotland, and as the storm cleared eastwards, it brought some significant snowfalls with blizzard conditions across upland in the north-east.

Impact

A number of homes were flooded in Cheshire, much of Northwich town centre was under water and residents of two care homes were evacuated by dinghy. Homes were also evacuated in Warrington, Chester, Didsbury and Northenden in Manchester, Ruthin and Bangor-on-Dee in North Wales,



Total rainfall amount between 18-20 January 2021

and Maghull in Merseyside due to rising floodwater, while some properties were also flooded in South Wales.

Evacuations were made more difficult by both the ongoing coronavirus pandemic and falling snow. A bridge over the River Clwyd in Denbighshire was swept away by floodwater, and the East Coast Main Line was affected by floods between York and Darlington.

The snowfalls caused travel disruption, with many roads affected by snow, the A9 closed south of Inverness and the Queensferry crossing closed for a time due to the risk of falling ice. Heavy hail showers led to poor driving conditions on the M5 near Bristol and caused multiple crashes including an overturned lorry. Avalanche debris was spotted in the Pentland Hills south-west of Edinburgh.

Despite 568 houses being flooded, estimates suggest that the actions of the cross-agency flood response protected over 38,000 properties.

