

Public Weather Service Communications Strategy 2007- 2012

1. Overview

The communications strategy for the Public Weather Service (PWS) is jointly owned by the Public Weather Service Customer Group (PWSCG) and the Met Office. Much of the strategy is driven by the PWSCG while most of the activities are carried out by the Met Office. PWS activities may be carried out in conjunction with other Met Office communication activities if this results in efficiencies.

The PWS Communication Strategy will be reviewed annually. Detailed 'living' plans will be developed for individual strands of the communication plan.

2. Situation

The importance and significance of Met Office's public weather service has increased during the last couple of years. At the beginning of FY 2007 the Met Office National Met. Programme, which provided the underpinning funding of the Met Office, and the Public Met. Service, which provided weather services for the public, were brought together to form the Public Weather Service. Thus funding for the outputs of the Public Weather Service, which comprises £64M from MoD and £18M from CAA, now also provides the Met Office's underpinning operational capability. The underpinning capability includes R&D to improve the PWS outputs, fulfilling international commitments on behalf of UK Government, and provision of forecast and observational data which are essential inputs to a wide range of other Met Office and other services.

PWS funding constitutes about half of the Met Office's revenue and is of critical importance not only because of the important life saving services it provide but also because it underpins many other weather services including direct services for MoD and DEFRA.

'PWS provides a range of weather information and weather-related warnings that enable the UK public to make informed decisions in their day to day activities, to optimise or mitigate against the impact of the weather, and to contribute to the protection of life, property and basic infrastructure.'

In April 2007 the Public Weather Service Customer Group (PWSCG) was established. The PWSCG acts as the customer on behalf of the public for all the free at the point of use weather services and also on behalf of Public Sector users of PWS outputs. The group has an independent Chair and members drawn from the civil contingency community. An additional independent member will be appointed September 2007 and there is also a BBC advisor. The PWSCG is supported by an 'intelligent' MoD Secretariat, the Head having previously worked at the Met Office.

In the past the Met Office has been largely responsible for defining the public weather service (or PMS as it was then) and a commissioning group has focussed on setting the priorities for the underpinning capability. The PWSCG is now responsible for

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setting the direction and requirements of the PWS outputs; it specifies what the outputs should be and sets related performance targets. The Met Office then prioritise and agrees internal R&D programmes which will deliver the current and future outputs as specified by the PWSCG.

Two consequences of the recent changes are:

- a new requirement for the diverse needs of the users of PWS to be clearly understood by the PWSCG so they are able to drive appropriate improvements; and
- the need to robustly monitor and measure the Met Office's delivery of the PWS outputs in terms of accuracy, reach, response and user-satisfaction.

3. Objectives

3.1 Met Office Corporate Objectives

- To deliver value to the UK taxpayer by providing the UK's Public Weather Service efficiently and effectively by:
 - o Making more weather information freely available to the public
 - o Improving the accuracy of our weather forecasts and publicly measure our performance
 - o Ensuring quick and easy access to the forecasts that the public needs
 - o Developing new services for the public, based on research and development
- To minimise the impact and cost of severe weather on life, property and infrastructure of the UK and its citizens

3.2 Marketing Communication Objectives

Marketing communications objectives have been segmented by public and Public Sector users and ongoing and new PWS outputs; there is significant overlap between the segments.

3.2.1 Ongoing: Public users

- o To clearly identify requirements
- o To raise awareness of PWS
- o To increase reach
- o To monitor and increase satisfaction with service
- o To increase public's understanding of forecasts
- o To increase response to forecasts, particularly warnings

Comment [r1]: To create the right services and in turn communicate the right messages

3.2.2 Ongoing: Public Sectors users

- o To clearly identify requirements
- o To raise awareness of PWS
- o To increase reach
- o To monitor and increase satisfaction with service
- o To increase response to warnings

3.2.3 New services: Public

- o To user-test new services

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- To raise awareness of new services/changes and launch
- To ensure resources in place for feedback

3.2.4 New services: Public Sector users

- To user-test new services
- To raise awareness of new services/changes and launch
- To ensure resources in place for feedback

4. Strategy

An integrated communications campaign will be implemented.

The strategy is to promote the Met Office public weather services rather than the 'Public Weather Service'. The risk associated with promoting PWS as a separate brand is that this will dilute the Met Office brand and cause confusion amongst users – as is sometimes the case with 'BBC weather'.

The link with the 'Met Office' is crucial as without a Met Office link PWS could lack credibility. The strong Met Office brand is also required to distinguish PWS outputs from forecasts from other sources.

For professional partners and other stakeholders the link between the Met Office and PWS is easier to establish and comprehend.

It is proposed that 2 sub-groups of the PWSCG are formed to be responsible for steering communications activities with the public and Public Sector users respectively, see 4.1.1a and 4.2.1a below.

4.1 Ongoing: Public Users

4.1.1 To clearly identify requirements

- PWSCG sub-group (H)**- to lead the communications activity with 'the public' and make recommendations to PWSCG. Composition of the group 2 or 3 PWSCG members (Independent member, LGA, HA, SE or WA) + BBC Advisor + Secretariat member. Other co-opted members to be considered. Group small enough to drive business; meetings as necessary.
- Annual Public User Forum (H)**- possibly led by Independent PWSCG member to obtain and test detailed requirements. Regional or national. Need to find representatives of the public – interested specialist groups such as mountaineers, ramblers, surfers. Interest in engagement expressed by tourist boards. Perhaps use local government groups. Workshop or carousel with activities considered.
- Specialist groups (M)** (tourism, mountaineers etc) - one-to-one meetings with individual groups to consider and develop detail of services. Adhoc, to be used to develop and test services. Convened by PWSCG sub-group.
- Met Office website (L)** – use to get feedback on different products and services from public users.
- Public Perception Surveys (H)** – monthly ORC currently. Limited information about requirements as the focus for this is really user satisfaction (see 4.1.4b). To be reviewed.

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- f. **Library and archive user satisfaction survey (H)** – email or web based survey to provide feedback (and comment on satisfaction). To be developed.
- g. **Customer centre feedback (M/L)** - subjective comments passed on from the Met Office customer centre. This needs to be collated in a form that is useful. Includes feedback on weather elements of BBC forecasts.

4.1.2 To raise awareness of PWS

- a. **Press releases (M)** - mainly when severe weather expected or for holiday periods or high profile events. Usually effective at raising awareness. Managed by Met Office press office.
- b. **Literature (L)** – through hotels, country parks etc. Consider articles and leaflets?
- c. **Internet (M/H)** - web promotion - consider promotion of services and links on specialist users websites.
- d. **Promotion of/by PWSCG (H)** – PWSCG Chairman as champion. Press release associated with PA Consulting ‘Value’ Report. Other PR as appropriate. Need to consider access to PWSCG by public – or not?
- e. **Met Office public open days (L)** – promoting all aspects of public weather service.
- f. **Customer centre and library and archive enquiry services (L)** – use to promote other PWS services.
- g. **Library awareness (L)** – 6-monthly newsletter. Family history outreach to encourage use of weather archive. Provide information on ‘family tree’ resources. Adverts on back page of *Weather*.

4.1.3 To increase reach

- a. **Web-based & mobile access to PWS (M/H)** - consider how to improve this e.g. use of RSS and other technologies. Also need to promote use of this beyond existing MO web users? Consider what technical improvements need to be made to make these attractive to other websites.
- b. **Other media outlets (L)** – consider how to make PWS outputs more widely available through these.
- c. **Improve search engine access to MO web site (M)** - by use of keywords in main body and page titles, and listings in web site directories.
- d. **Monitor technological advances (M/H)** - to identify new delivery options.
- e. **BBC broadcast services (L)** – consider reach across BBC services in conjunction with Met Office. Should these focus on reaching different users.

4.1.4 To monitor and increase satisfaction with service

- a. **Public Perception surveys (H)** – currently monthly with ORC. Review and ensure these are focussed on measuring satisfaction robustly. Review Utility Index in conjunction with public perception research. Ensure these are targeted at assessing satisfaction with warnings as well as forecasts during ‘quiet’ weather.
- b. **Web-based satisfaction surveys (H)** – consider value of these.
- c. **Email or written questionnaires (H)** - ensure robust measures for library and archive service and climatological record service.

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- d. **Customer feedback service (M/L)** – ensure this is collated appropriately (could it be made more objective) if to be used as a measure of satisfaction with PWS. Is the customer feedback service satisfactory? Consider Mystery shopper type tests or similar to check enquiry service standard.

4.1.5 To increase understanding of forecasts

- a. **More 'education' (M)** – through website, leaflets, articles. Focus more on the confidence and uncertainty in forecasts.
- b. **Develop probability/uncertainty information (L)** – to complement deterministic forecasts.
- c. **Review clarity (L)** - of PWS outputs on web and other outlets.
- d. **Joint messages (H)** - delivered in partnership with professional partners. Ensure complete consistency.

4.1.6 To increase response to forecasts and particularly warnings

- a. **Response advice (M)** – improved communication on what action to take before and during severe weather and benefits.
- b. **Joint messages (H)** - delivered in partnership with professional partners. Ensure complete consistency.
- c. **Improve confidence (L)** – improve accuracy and communication of forecasts. Focus R&D. Explore ways to express impact and confidence effectively.

4.2 Ongoing: Public Sectors Users

4.2.1 To clearly identify requirements

- a. **PWSCG members (H)** – close liaison with individual members using their expertise and that of their colleagues to inform and guide communications activity with 'Public Sector users'. Use to make recommendations to PWSCG.
- b. **NSWWS feedback forms (H)** - via web and newsletter. Consider also distributing monthly by e-mail to selection of newsletter recipients to ensure representative. Use newsletter to communicate importance of feedback. Need to ensure feedback is in a form that can be consolidated and used.
- c. **Public Sector User Forum or working group (H)** - to be established to participate in workshops or carousel of activities. To provide feedback to PWSCG sub-group on requirements and for output-testing.
- d. **PWS Advisors (M)** - informal feedback following incidents or exercises.

4.2.2 To raise awareness of PWS

- a. **PWS newsletter (H)** - issued monthly except during summer months. Expand distribution list for PWS Newsletter
- b. **Conferences and exhibitions (M)** - Identify suitable and appropriate conferences to be attended by PWS Advisors.
- c. **Exercises (H)** - PWS Advisors to attend exercises at request of professional partners. Continued efforts to raise awareness of PWS by Advisors.
- d. **PWS Advisors (M)** - to raise awareness of PWS through local contacts.

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- e. **Articles (M)** - in professional magazines.
- f. **Formal Guidance on PWS (M/L)** – consider producing ‘official’ document about PWS like ‘Preparing Scotland’.
- g. **Promotion by PWSCG (H)** – PWSCG Chairman and members as champions. Press release associated with PA Consulting ‘Value’ Report. Other PR as appropriate.
- h. **Senior briefings (M)** – to raise awareness at very senior level including climate change awareness.

4.2.3 To increase reach

- a. **Individual targeting (H/M)** - through PWS Advisors with advice from PWSCG sub-group.
- b. **Via promotion (M)** - either through events or professional magazines, or by distributed mailings. Encourage community to self-register or contact Advisor.
- c. **‘Reach’ check (M)** - need to develop some method of testing what percentage of ‘market’ is receiving service so can target gaps.

4.2.4 To monitor and increase satisfaction with service

- a. **User research (H)** – consider monthly email to query satisfaction & response. ~1000 annually, ~80 each month with all regions/user types represented each month. Based on last warning. Could also target research after a significant event. Need to ensure this is appropriate and will allow improvements to be recognised
- b. **NSWWS feedback forms (L)** - via web and newsletter. These mainly for collating requirements but may be useful for assessing satisfaction.
- c. **PWS Advisors (H)** - to build relationships with professional partners and ‘add value’.
- d. **Customer feedback service (M/L)** – ensure any feedback from professional partners is collated appropriately (could it be made more objective) if to be used as a measure of satisfaction with PWS.

4.2.5 To increase response to warnings

- a. **PWS Advisors (H)** - to provide advice and participate in exercises.
- b. **Formal Guidance on PWS (M/L)** – consider producing ‘official’ document about PWS like ‘Preparing Scotland’ with information on how to respond.
- c. **Improve confidence (M)** – improve accuracy and communication of forecasts. Focus R&D. Focus forecasts on ‘risk’. Vary thresholds for warnings for different users. Incorporate response in risk analysis.
- d. **Joint messages (H)** - delivered in partnership with professional partners. Ensure complete consistency.

4.3 **New Services: Public**

4.3.1 To user-test new services

- a. **Public forums/workshops (L)** - to provide feedback as appropriate.
- b. **Web site – secure area (L)** - where new services could be tested and evaluated by selected users.
- c. **Specialist user groups (L)** - to attend assisted sessions to user test.

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4.3.2 To raise awareness of new services/changes and launch

- a. **Press release (M)** - at time of launch.
- b. **Web site promotion (M)** - in lead up to and at launch of new services/changes.
- c. **Advertising (L)** - consider opportunities for specialist services in specialist journals e.g. mountaineering journals for changes to mountain forecast services.
- d. **Customer Centre and library and Archive enquiry services (L)** - to promote changes/additions to services.
- e. **Library and Archive newsletter (L)** - to promote changes to those services.
- f. **Met Office public open days (L)** - to promote changes/improvements.

4.3.3 To ensure resources in place for feedback

- a. **Identify mechanisms for measuring/monitoring feedback (M)** - before product launch

4.4 New Services: Public Sector Users

4.4.1 To user-test new services

- a. **Working Groups (M)** – established as necessary to ensure new services thoroughly tested
- b. **Exercises (M)** – selected use by PWS Advisors.
- c. **Web site – secure area (L)** - where new services could be tested and evaluated by selected users.

4.4.2 To raise awareness of new services/changes and launch

- a. **PWS newsletter (M)** – details of new service/changes
- b. **PWS Advisors (M/H)** - to ensure professional partners are aware of any new developments and provide guidance on use.
- c. **Web site promotion (L)** - in lead up to and at launch of new services/changes.
- d. **Exhibitions and articles (L)** – to be considered
- e. **Promotion by PWSCG (M/L)**– as appropriate

4.4.3 To ensure resources in place for feedback

- a. **Identify mechanisms for measuring/monitoring feedback (M)** - before product launch

5. Target Audience

There are two main target audiences for PWS services, the general public and professional partners.

5.1 General Public

This is an extremely large target audience and it may not be possible to target everyone. Press releases which receive good coverage in the national media will

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be effective at raising awareness of PWS during high profile events (severe weather or very significant event) and reaching a large part of the audience.

At other less significant weather times it may not be possible to 'reach' and 'influence' the majority of the audience. On these occasions emphasis should be based on reaching those most likely to be influenced by and benefit from PWS services. These main target audiences include those who:

- have a good awareness and interest of weather.
- are involved in activities that are weather sensitive – such as sailing, walking where the benefits and risks are greatest.

General promotion of the Met Office and Met Office website, the BBC Broadcasting Service and work to ensure the reach of PWS is increased, will ensure that the public know where to access PWS outputs when they need the information. The outputs should be easily assessable and easy to comprehend even for the occasional user.

5.2 Professional Partners

This should include professional partners at all levels, including those in blue light services, civil contingencies and emergency response at both national and regional levels.

6. Project Evaluation

After any significant change to outputs, some form of project appraisal should be completed. The main objectives at this stage will be to:

- improve future product development efforts
- review 'success' of new output
- move the product from a new product status to being an ongoing product requiring long term maintenance
- re-launch the output if it is not meeting expectations

7. Positioning

These are free at the point of use services for the general public and professional partners. They are not designed to be tailored to individuals needs and instead are aimed at large scale audiences. These products/services need to be affordable within PWS funding. Where tailored services are required, these should be considered to be commercial requests and fall outside of the PWS service.

8. Key Messages

Products and services are:

- free (at the point of use) services for the public
- provided by the Met Office – the National Meteorological Service for the UK
- based on world leading science and expertise
- reliable – based on 24/7 capability and resilience (for professional partners)

9. Marcomms Activity

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A detailed gantt/activity chart details the activities identified for FY07/08, along with budgets, timescales and responsibilities. See Annex A.

10. Control & Evaluation

Actions will be monitored against objectives, budget and timescales. Where appropriate, campaign codes will be set up to track response and the effectiveness of individual media.

E-mail campaigns will be monitored and reports produced on readership figures e.g. for PWS and Library and Archive newsletters.

Wash-up reports will be produced for any major conference attendances.

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