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SECMP0024 'Enduring Approach to Communications Hub Firmware Management'

2nd Working Group

3rd July 2017, 10am – 12.30pm,
Gemserv, 8 Fenchurch Place, London, EC3M 4AJ

Meeting Headlines

Attendees:

Organisation	Working Group Member
E.ON (Proposer)	Robert Williams
British Gas	Allan Row
Co-operative Energy	Beverley Comley (part)
EDF Energy	Paul Wheeler
EDMI Meters	Tom Wooley
In Home Displays	Marc Bowden
Landis & Gyr	Elias Hanna
Npower	Stephen Lowell
Scottish Power	Mahfuzar Rahman
Scottish Power	Stephen Pickering
SSE	Emslie Law

Representing	Other participants
SECAS	Helen Fosberry (Chair)
	Sasha Townsend (SECAS Modification Lead)
	Urszula Thorpe (Technical Support)
	Caroline Gundu (Observer)
DCC	Nicola Roteglia
	Parmjeet Dayal
BEIS	Christopher Avgherinos (part)

Introduction

Since the first Working Group (WG) for SECMP0024 in January 2017, the DCC held three Device Firmware Management workshops, in which this modification was also considered. Following discussions at the workshop, SECAS and the DCC met with the Proposer to agree the scope of SECMP0024. The Proposer confirmed that SECMP0024 still seeks to develop an enduring solution for managing Communication Hub (CH) firmware. The purpose of this WG meeting was to agree on the business requirements for the solution.

Testing

The DCC provided an update on testing arrangements for CH firmware updates noting that:

- the End to End (E2E) test cycle for core DCC Releases will be consulted upon with Users;
- CH firmware is expected to be made available early in the test cycles; and
- maintenance Releases are not defined.

The WG questioned whether User Integration Testing (UIT) will be available for maintenance Releases and agreed that more information is required to assist the development of requirements in relation to the notification of Releases.

ACTION_0307_01: DCC to provide clarity on enduring testing arrangements, particularly the access Users will have for testing maintenance Releases.

Notifications and Classifications of CH Firmware Updates

The DCC advised that Users will be informed of core Releases, including CH firmware updates, via Release “road maps” and Release Notes. For core Releases, Release Notes will be published following Systems Integration Testing (SIT) and UIT. Users will be notified of maintenance Releases once the Release is production-ready.

Release Notes are available to all DCC Users on the DCC’s operational SharePoint. The WG considered that classifying each CH firmware upgrade within the Release Note could slow the User’s decision to deploy CH firmware using the proposed safe launch process. This is because Release Notes may be too granular, particularly noting that Small Suppliers may not have the time or resources to interrogate each Release Note.

Discussions followed on whether the DCC should also notify Users of CH firmware updates for security or emergency Releases. SECAS highlighted that these firmware updates are considered by the Security Sub-Committee (SSC) and the DCC are currently relieved of its obligation to notify Users. However, the DCC advised that in the event of a security/emergency incident, a Release Note will be issued as early as possible.

The WG agreed that the Users’ priority is to be able to use the proposed new safe launch process for CH firmware updates included in core and maintenance Releases. It was agreed that the classification of all firmware updates (including security/emergency events), and necessary timescales, are requirements of this modification. However, the ability to safe launch security/emergency CH firmware updates is not a requirement of SECMP0024. It was also agreed that the DCC need to develop the framework for classifications and define them with a priority criteria.

ACTION_0307_02: DCC to confirm timescales in relation to “road maps” of Releases, including CH firmware updates, and Release classifications, including Release type (i.e. core or maintenance), their priority and severity.

Safe Launch Process

The Proposer and The WG discussed which supplier would be responsible for the proposed safe launch process where there are different suppliers for the Electricity Smart Metering Equipment (ESME) and the Gas Smart Metering Equipment (GSME). It was suggested that the WG should agree requirements for a single supplier scenario for both ESME and GSME, before considering requirements and communications for a dual supplier scenario. The Proposer and WG also agreed that participation in the safe launch process should be optional for suppliers.

WG agreed that a new Service Request (SR) to instruct the safe launch process was the most efficient method. The proposed new SR will specify the Device IDs that the DCC should deploy and activate firmware to. The new SR would have a similar design to the current SR11.1 'Update Firmware' and the DCC will be required to deploy the firmware within a 5-day Target Response Time (TRT). However, suppliers will not send another SR to activate the firmware, unlike the process for firmware updates on ESME and GSME.

Discussions followed on whether suppliers also want to request firmware activation in addition to deployment. Several WG Members highlighted that this will enable simultaneous activation on various Devices on a Smart Metering System (SMS). SECAS highlighted that this requirement would impact the SEC security arrangements and would be of interest to the Security Sub-Committee (SSC). It was also noted that the requirement would likely increase the cost of the modification considerably and questions were raised in relation to how the cost to include activation would be justified. The Proposer confirmed that the scope of this modification is for suppliers to request firmware deployment only.

Incident Management

The WG discussed how the DCC and DCC Users could extend the safe launch process duration, in order to fix issues prior to a CH firmware being mass deployed. The DCC provided a brief overview of the incident management process and highlighted that an incident "ticket" can be raised if a CH firmware update impacted the Home Area Network (HAN).

However, the DCC advised that they need to understand the impacts of a safe launch process from an operational perspective, because some issues may not be a DCC issues to resolve. For example, it may be a Device Manufacturer issue. Therefore, the DCC agreed to investigate their problem management procedure further to see how they can feedback issues to suppliers, subject to competition law.

As a result of these discussions, the Proposer and WG agreed that it is not necessary to seek the formation of a device firmware sub-committee, in accordance with the original Modification Proposal.

The DCC also advised that CH firmware versions are supported to the last release and the current release at any given time.

ACTION_0307_03: DCC to provide further information on incident, problem, and device management and how it can assist with issues relating to CH firmware.