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SECMP0067 ‘Service Request Traffic Management’ July 2020 ad hoc Working Group – meeting summary

Attendees

Attendee	Organisation
Alison Beard	SECAS
Harry Jones	SECAS
David Walsh	DCC
Gary Bailey	DCC
Graeme Liggett	DCC
Mari Toda	DCC
Andy Darroch	DCC
Rochelle Harrison	Centrica
Paul Saker	EDF Energy
Martin Weller	EDF Energy
Nina Lintott	Gilmond
James Evans	Gilmond
John Noad	Npower
Mahfuzar Rahman	Scottish Power
Emslie Law	SSE
Andy Knowles	Utilita
Rachel Norberg	Utilita
Gemma Slaney	Western Power Distribution

Discussions

Issue, Solution and Progress

There was a brief recap of the issue which led to the Modification Proposal being raised. The Proposed Solution was then stated with the plan to introduce service capacity allocations to Smart Energy Code (SEC) Parties so that if the Data Communications Company (DCC) Systems approach reaching full capacity, the Users can have their request volumes regulated to ensure the heavy Service Request traffic didn't lead to an outage. A summary of the progress that has been made since the Modification Report was sent to Ofgem was delivered.

Following Ofgem's return of the Modification Report, the Smart Energy Code Administrator and Secretariat (SECAS) had acted upon Ofgem's request to provide additional clarity to the business

case. SECAS explained this had been completed by adding a new paragraph into the Discussions and Developments section of the report which stated why the Proposed Solution was better than the alternatives proposed such as buying additional infrastructure to cope with the heavy demand spikes.

Implementation Approach and TABASC Comments

The Modification Report was also changed to reflect that the Modification Proposal is now being considered for implementation in the June 2021 SEC Release. It was noted that once the Proposed Solution was implemented in June 2021, if the mechanism was activated all Users would receive an HTTP 503 “Service Unavailable” response code. Users would be able to receive a different response code in the form of HTTP 429 “Too many Requests” by uplifting to a DUIS version which includes this change. Under this implementation approach, DUIS v4.1 would be introduced and linked to this new response code, meaning any User who uplifts to this version would be able to receive the HTTP 429 response code instead of the HTTP 503.

The Working Group was also given a summary of a discussion around the Solution which took place at the Technical Architecture and Business Architecture Sub-Committee (TABASC) earlier this month. It detailed that two options were presented on behalf of the Proposer asking whether in order for Users to make use of the HTTP 429 response, they should either:

- Link the HTTP 429 response code to a version of DCC User Interface Specification (DUIS) which can be incorporated as close to the Modification Proposal’s implementation date as possible; or
- Request for Users who’s systems are capable of handling HTTP 429 responses to manually notify the DCC so that they can send out the different response code.

The TABASC unanimously voted for the first option where a version of DUIS would be linked to the HTTP 429 code. The Working Group agreed with this. One Working Group member stated that although they believed that the first option was the better of the two, they still had reservations about having the Modification Proposal’s implementation date five months before the planned DUIS release including the HTTP 429 response code. This point was noted, and the DCC stated that this was so that the traffic management mechanism could be implemented as soon as possible. It was added that if Parties wanted the mechanism and the DUIS changes to go live at the same time the solution would have to be delayed until November 2021, meaning that any issues/outages arising from Service Request traffic in those 5 months could have been prevented.

CSP and User Impact queries

One Working Group member raised an issue concerning activity earlier in 2020 where they questioned whether the Service Request caps would be suitable and whether the solution accounted for Communication Service Provider (CSP) issues. The Working Group member also questioned what happened if the CSP was down and the DSP kept receiving SRs, would this cause a DSP outage? The DCC confirmed that the DSP has a re-try process and if the CSP has an outage they would employ the re-try strategy before returned the SRs to the User with a re-try message.

The DCC confirmed they would investigate an activity which one Working Group member reported which led to a large number of Service Requests requiring management (being delayed by the Supplier). The DCC also confirmed that the intention of the Modification Proposal was to protect Data Service Provider (DSP) only, but stated that as the DSP was the first “gateway” in the DCC Systems, it made sense to strengthen that area.

The Working Group asked whether an analysis of what impact there is on the CSP with or without the Modification Proposal's solution in place could be provided. Some Working Group members further noted there was no longer a holistic approach to "prioritisation" of the Service Requests in the Proposed Solution. SECAS and DCC provided an explanation that this was down to previous discussions where it was previously agreed upon that it would be down to the individual User to prioritise their own order of Service Request priority. This was so that it would allow each User to tailor their priorities, rather than have a particular priority list imposed upon them which they may disagree with. Some members added that without holistic prioritisation, there will be additional costs individually to re-design their business processes to handle an order of Service Requests or to reduce demand if they were notified that they were close to exceeding their given capacity limit. SECAS requested clarity and a Working Group member stated that Users systems generally reflected consumer behaviour, for instance if there was cold weather they would see an increase in PPM top up activity, this would lead to an increase in their SR traffic, potentially taking them over their allocation but this would not be prioritised within the business. Therefore, if the traffic management mechanism activated some Users systems as currently configured would not prioritise the most urgent requests such as PPM top ups. SECAS requested that any of the details be provided in any future consultation - anonymously if Users preferred – so that it could help inform a business case for the Modification Proposal. One Working Group member enquired into using Anomaly Detection Thresholds (ADTs) as an option for the solution. The DCC noted that although considered, the ADTs were not granular enough to form robust protection and added that Service Requests subject to ADTs are still received by the DSP. Because of this, the ADT mechanism would not prevent a DSP outage and therefore would not provide protection against the Service Request traffic leading to a DCC System failure. Some parties noted that this Modification Proposal may not be ready for consultation as the solution concerns have not been addressed.

Next Steps

SECAS

DCC will provide further information around the effects on the CSP and issue a second Refinement Consultation. This included the impacts the solution would or wouldn't have on the CSP and note the User concerns where individual costs would be incurred to change business processes to accommodate the solution. SECAS also agreed to inform the TABASC of the meeting outcomes and acknowledge that the Working Group agreed with their preferred method of dealing with the response codes.

DCC

The DCC agreed to investigate the activity quoted by the Working Group member concerning activity they had to undertake in restricting their Service Request traffic at the start of 2020. After investigations are completed, any information would be provided to SECAS for inclusion in the Modification Report.