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SECMP0024 ‘Enduring Approach to Communication Hub Firmware Management’

September 2020 Working Group – meeting summary

Attendees

Attendee	Organisation
Ali Beard	SECAS
Joe Hehir	SECAS
Joey Manners	SECAS
Tim Newton	Gemserv
David Walsh	DCC
Glenn Critchley	DCC
Robin Seaby	DCC
Robert Munro	DCC
Mari Toda	DCC
Simon Trivella	British Gas
Paul Saker	EDF
Alex Hurcombe	EDF
Rob Williams	E.ON
Elias Hanna	Landis + Gyr
Alastair Cobb	Landis + Gyr
John Noad	Npower
Mahfuzar Rahman	Scottish Power
Emslie Law	SSE/OVO
Matthew Alexander	SSEN
Gemma Slaney	WPD
Rachel Norberg	Utilita

Issue

SECAS stated the issue is that there isn't an enduring process for managing firmware updates to Communications Hubs.

Because of this, there's a risk that a Communications Hub firmware update with defects or interoperability issues could be deployed and activated to significant numbers of Communications

Hubs. This could create a range of issues arising from a DCC deployed CH firmware update occurring simultaneously with, for example, a programmed configuration change to a Supplier's smart metering Device or a Supplier's scheduled firmware deployment to a smart metering Device.

Proposed Solution

DCC's Preliminary Assessment

The DCC advised its solution does not seek to modify the firmware testing and assurance processes or deployment and activation mechanisms used during the upgrade of Communications Hubs, but to formalise the process by which the DCC and Suppliers interact during an upgrade cycle. It noted that irrespective of each solution option, the process involves:

- A Pilot phase in which relevant Suppliers are provided with a Default Pilot List of target Communications Hubs and a Default Pilot Schedule and can respond with a Preferred Pilot List and Preferred Pilot Schedule;
- A Safe Launch phase in which Suppliers are provided with a Safe Launch Schedule;
- Suppliers receiving notifications on activation of firmware by individual Communications Hubs;
- DCC reporting on status of Pilot and Safe Launch phases.

The DCC provided a summary of the Preliminary Assessment it had carried out, which was against two solution options:

Option 1: CH Firmware Management with Service Request

The general principle behind Option 1 is to allow Service Users to share relevant data in support of the Communications Hub firmware management process via Service Requests. The success and failure of any processing stage could be communicated back to the Service Users via either DCC Alerts or emails.

Option 2: CH Firmware Management via Web Portal

Option 2 is the Web Portal based solution and will be built using the existing Self-Service Interface (SSI) and Self-Service Management Interface (SSMI) suite. The SSI and SSMI will be updated to provide new interfaces to manage all stages of the Communications Hub firmware update process. The solution will not require any amendments to existing or the introduction of new Service Requests.

Both options would provide an Alert to Users upon the activation of Communications Hub firmware.

Working Group views

SECAS noted the TABASC's preferred option 2 as it would be easier to implement for both the DCC and Users. It also believed it would be more cost effective than option 1. However, overall, it still felt that option 2 was too expensive as it was simply formalising processes already in place via email.

The TABASC asked the Working Group to consider a SharePoint option and solution that would only provide an Alert to Users upon the activation of Communications Hub firmware.

The Working Group agreed and preferred option 2, but again thought that overall, it would not be cost effective. However, a member expressed concern with solution that utilised the SSI due to the periods of maintenance occurring to it, making it unavailable for periods of time.

The Working Group also considered exploring a SharePoint option but did not believe it would reduce costs enough to warrant using it and the time it would take to assess it.

The Working Group reluctantly agreed that a Preliminary Assessment should be requested for an Alert to Users upon the activation of Communications Hub firmware only. Suppliers felt that this was the minimum it needed to improve the visibility of Communications Hub firmware updates and that this would improve Supplier experience.

Existing governance and user experience

Although they agreed that a Preliminary Assessment should be requested for an Alert to Users upon the activation of Communications Hub firmware, the Proposer expressed concern that the DCC still has the ability to deploy firmware updates to Communications Hubs with seven days' notice. Other Suppliers agreed and advised that can be rushed and chaotic and it does not give them time test sufficiently.

Consequently, the Working Group asked SECAS and the DCC to explore the development of a firmware management policy or the changing of the provisions in the SEC to give Suppliers more control and oversight of Communications Hub firmware updates.

Next steps

The following actions were recorded from the meeting:

- SECAS to request a Preliminary Assessment for Users to receive an Alert upon activation of Communications Hub firmware.
- SECAS and the DCC to investigate developing a firmware management policy or changing the provisions in the SEC to give Suppliers more control and oversight of Communications Hub firmware updates.