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SECMP0024 ‘Enduring Approach to Communication Hub Firmware Management’

1st Working Group

9th January 2017 13:00 – 15:00

Gemserv, 8 Fenchurch Place, London, EC3M 4AJ

Meeting Headlines

Attendees:

Organisation	Working Group Member
E.ON (Proposer)	Robert Williams
National Grid Smart	Leon Wright
Scottish Power	Angel Oses de Leon
SSE	Emslie Law
Utiligroup	Daniel Blackburn

Representing	Other participants
SECAS	Adam Lattimore (Chair)
	Sasha Townsend (SECAS Modification Support)
	Ian Swanson (Technical Support)
	Joana Esgalhado (Observer)
DCC	Eric Taylor
	Chris Gale

Apologies:

Organisation	Working Group Member
E.ON	David Lyons
British Gas	Allan Row

Modification Proposal overview

The Proposer provided an overview of SECMP0024, highlighting the issues they have encountered with Smart Metering Equipment Technical Specifications 1 (SMETS1) Communications Hub (CH) firmware updates. The modification seeks to develop an enduring solution for CH firmware deployment and activation.

Current arrangements

The Working Group (WG) discussed the current arrangements, noting that the DCC and their Communication Service Providers (CSPs) are not constrained in how they deploy and activate firmware updates. The only requirements are that updated firmware pass relevant testing, as set out in SEC Section T – ‘Testing During Transition’ and that the DCC Users are notified 7 days in advance of the activation of any firmware image.

The DCC highlighted the testing provisions that will come into legal effect in early February 2017¹. It was noted that there are currently no requirements for the extent of user testing of new Communications Hub versions against existing Devices. However, where a new version is introduced, user testing requirements shall be set out in the applicable modification.

Working Group consideration of the problem

SECAS provided an overview of the problem this modification is trying to resolve. This included examples of conflicts and scenarios of potential problems surrounding;

- interoperability;
- faulty meter replacements;
- install and leave; and
- In Home Display (IHD) stranding.

It was also noted that firmware upgrades to CHs for SMETS1 have experienced problems with regression of smart metering devices.

Release 1.3 Hypercare Approach

It was noted that an internal DCC change ‘Hypercare for Release 1.3 CH Firmware Upgrades’ has been considered at the DCC CH & SM-WAN Design Forum. The DCC highlighted that whilst this will be in place as part of Release 1.3, it will be for a period of 6 months following the first CH firmware upgrade. The DCC also advised that a solution has not yet been agreed and there has been a lack of guidance from industry. The WG recognised that the scale of the Hypercare approach will be significantly less than any enduring approach, due to the number of meters installed.

Working Group consideration of the solution

The following considerations were made in relation to the proposed requirements:

- The DCC highlighted that CSPs will deploy firmware in line with the Installation Validity Periods (IVPs) and Maintenance Validity Periods (MVPs), and in the most cost effective

¹ Following the BEIS September 2016 Consultation on Smart Energy Code and DCC Licence Amendments.

manner. Therefore, considerations on how firmware upgrades could be classified by severity and priority will need to be made in relation to notifications prior to deployment;

- The DCC noted that they are currently looking into ways of communicating CH firmware update information to suppliers, such as 'release notes'. However, they require further guidance on what Users would like to be included;
- SEC Panel or a Sub-Committee may not ensure a fair and represented determination on the deployment and activation of CH firmware, particularly in the potential situation where only one or minimal Users experience problems with an update;
- The WG agreed that Registered Supplier Agents (RSAs) should also be included within the scope of the modification.

The DCC suggested two alternative approaches to the one proposed:

1. Scheduling approach – this would involve the scheduling of CH firmware upgrades. Firmware deployment and activation would go ahead on the specified dates, without any further supplier/RSA engagement on whether it should proceed or not. In this approach, suppliers/RSAs would be able to get involved in the scheduling exercise.
2. Querying the CH – this would provide the supplier/RSA with the ability to query CHs to interrogate the status of firmware upgrades; for example, to check whether firmware upgrades had been deployed and are pending activation.

Next steps

The WG agreed that further consideration is needed on all potential options. Particularly, the time scales suppliers/RSAs require between notification and deployment in order to test various scales of CH firmware.

ACTION_0901_01 – SECAS to produce strawman solutions for the approaches discussed and to circulate these to WG Members and Energy UK for further consideration.