

## **Management Overview - Changes to the Civil Centre Network**

### **Summary**

Following a review of the Civil Centre network in the UK and consideration of a number of options, the Met Office Board believe that centralisation of forecasting production would best meet the requirements of the organisation and stakeholders. We are now entering into a period of consultation with staff, Trades Union (Prospect), stakeholders, MPs and representatives from the devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales to discuss this proposal.

### **Background**

There is a responsibility on the Met Office as a Trading Fund to provide an efficient, value for money, public met service for the UK and to exploit scientific and technological advances to deliver quality services and products which meet the needs of business customers.

To deliver the weather services required, now and in the future, the Met Office has invested over many years to improve computer forecasts through increasing understanding of the science and utilisation of massive supercomputer power. Significant advances in how the atmosphere is observed – necessary for any forecast to take place – such as satellite and weather radar have also delivered benefits in the forecasting process. At the same time technological advances, particularly in telecommunications, enable introduction of changes in the production process.

While there is still an important human involvement in the forecasting process this is reducing with time, and needs to be used in a way that adds real value to the output. The role has evolved and forecasters are now more involved with service provision - interpreting the likely weather impacts and helping users and customers to make best use of the information available and mitigate risks.

The Met Office is continually reviewing the production process recognising an ongoing requirement to deliver the benefits from investment and to reduce production costs. The civil production network has been gradually centralised since its peak in 1990 (14 Centres) through continual improvements in Numerical Weather Prediction (NWP) and IT infrastructure. Two hundred and fifteen posts have been removed from the production process over the last 5 years. One aspect was the change to the civil production network – reducing from 14 centres to 6 – Aberdeen, Belfast, Manchester, Birmingham, Cardiff and London in 2000.

### **Production Process Review**

The options reviewed were:

- Option 0 - no change from the current situation
- Option 1 - full centralisation with partial automation of forecast production for commercial services
- Option 2 - full centralisation with full automation of commercial services
- Option 3 - 3 centres of excellence (London, Aberdeen and Manchester plus the Ops Centre at Exeter)

## Cost/benefit Analysis.

The outcome of the cost/benefit analysis for the options is summarised below.

Financial Summary	5 Years	10 Years
	£k	£k
Option 0 - No Change	(2,280)	
Option 1 - Centralisation (partial automation)	3,652	20,691
Option 2 - Centralisation (full automation)	(26,952)	(26,952)
Option 3 - Centres of Excellence	4,569	15,367

Benefits positive    Costs in brackets.

**Option 0** was rejected as this did not deliver the cost savings required by the business.

**Option 1** - Centralisation and partial automation was recommended as this demonstrates a clear financial advantage compared to option 3.

**Option 2** was rejected. Automation of production would deliver production cost savings but this option was rejected as quality of fully automated products would not meet customer requirements and would be likely to lead to significant loss of business.

**Option 3** – delivers benefits but significantly less than option 1 and does not deliver the longer term flexibility to respond to changing business needs.

Having carried out an extensive analysis to determine the impacts on people, costs and revenue, we believe that Option 1 - centralisation and partial automation of forecast production, and a clearer separation of forecast production and service provision as delivered by consultants, can meet the business requirements now and in the future. Met Office investment in infrastructure and technology has considerably enhanced forecasting capability over the last several years and would now enable a centralised production process.

Centralisation of production would reduce duplication in the forecast production process, deliver a more efficient organisation and enable further investment in other areas of the Met Office - particularly post processing to take advantage of improvements in NWP. This would help enable the Met Office to meet the aims of government and commercial customers.

## Staff

There are around 120 people directly involved in civil production in the network who would be impacted by the change. A significant reduction in requirements would be delivered through production rationalisation and it is expected that 60 people would be transferred to the Operations Centre. Positions would be filled through open competition - staff who are successful would be offered similar support where practical, to those involved in Relocation from Bracknell to Exeter.

Positions in the Operations Centre which change substantially would also be filled through open competition.

A number of staff (about 25) in the affected centres are expected to retire over the next 5 years. The Met Office would aim to redeploy remaining staff to other positions in the organisation. We would invest in training to enable this and expect to redeploy the majority of staff in this way. There may be a few individual cases where this may not be possible for compassionate or other reasons and these would be handled sympathetically on an individual basis.

Where staff have a preference to leave the organisation we would provide a redeployment service similar to that provided through the relocation to Exeter.

Nevertheless, we see these changes as representing an opportunity for those staff concerned. We have recognised a changing career path for forecasters for many years; forecasters have commented on a lack of real structure and opportunity for frontline staff. We expect there to be growing opportunities for personal development when forecast centralisation has taken place. These opportunities would be within the Operations Centre and forecasters taking on other challenges available at Exeter such as in Technology & Applied Science, Project Management or Business.

Senior managers are planning visits to all the Civil Centres to take place by mid July – these are to provide more detail on the proposals and to consult with staff impacted by the changes. It is intended to set up an internal web page and project email address - to be used by staff to keep up to date with information and to enable them to feed back their views on the proposals.

### **Production Centralisation**

All civil forecasting production would be centralised in the Operations Centre in Exeter – this would be expanded to accommodate the additional tasks. It is expected the project would take 2 years – aiming to deliver the changes by 31 March 2007. The majority of the change would not require any significant technological development though there are key projects:-

- enhancements to OpenRoad production to ensure consistency in graph production and improve forecaster alert tools
- product building using a forecast components database including access by multiple users.

The aim is to migrate production by business sector/product range over the period of the project. There would need to be integration of training, personnel and production transfers to enable this approach to be successful.

Production methodology would be based on techniques already being used successfully for a number of services – essentially using a quality controlled database of components to reduce duplication and ensure consistency. Forecast products would be built from these 'standard' components.

It is expected that transfer of OpenRoad services from other Civil Centres would take place either before winter 2006/07 (depending on the successful delivery of the OpenRoad

development project) or in spring 2007. Previous network change projects followed this approach and delivered successfully.

Forecast centralisation would produce greater flexibility - we would be able to use our weather forecasts to plan increased staffing levels when severe weather is forecast and deliver an increase in the availability of weather advice for the public. Also a large centralised production unit would be able to respond to changes in demand from the customer base. With the existing network, it is difficult making adjustments to workloads which do not result in increased production rates rather than reduced staff costs or to an overstretched local team.

It is essential that service quality and regional knowledge is retained - initially by transferring staff into the Ops Centre from the civil network. The Operations Centre would have a mix of product and regional responsibilities to ensure that services meet customer expectations and to maintain service quality. Previous rationalisations have shown that local knowledge can be transferred and service quality maintained.

In the longer term staff training and improved communication with the defence network would ensure regional knowledge is maintained in the longer term. The Met Office diverse and nationwide recruitment policy would also contribute to retention of regional knowledge.

### **Consultants**

One of the aims of the Met Office is to enable customers to maximise benefit and reduce risk associated with weather events. Forecasting would adapt to deliver these requirements - migrating from data provision services to provision of higher value consultancy services. The expectation is an increase in consulting activity, working with customers to mitigate risks.

Consultants are planned to meet existing customer requirements e.g. the recently implemented Public Weather Service consultants (4) , Military aviation in Northern Ireland (6) and Marine consultants (1 in Aberdeen, and 1 for offshore deployments) to deliver services for the offshore oil and gas industry. Others can easily be deployed when the need arises – such as occurred recently with the Highways Agency.

Services to the Media would be largely unaffected by the proposals, in particular the Met Office has staff at BBC and ITN providing forecasts to the national and regional media.

Defence production will continue in Belfast to meet the requirements of General Officer Commanding Northern Ireland (GOCNI) while civil production would be centralised in the Operations Centre.

### **Regional Presence**

The Met Office would maintain a strong regional presence to meet customer requirements. The proposals allow for greater flexibility in meeting our changing business needs. In particular, the number of weather consultants employed around the UK would reflect business requirements and should increase where new services are agreed and funded by customers. The recently appointed Public Weather Service consultants, offshore weather consultants and the winter 2004/5 trial with consultants based at the Highways Agency reflect changing customer requirements.

Scotland – 3 offices supplying services to Military customers at RAFs Leuchars, Kinloss and Lossiemouth, a large office in Edinburgh which has responsibility for UK observations quality and Public Weather Service relationships with the Scottish Executive. There are also staff engaged in sales account management. In total about 80 staff in Scotland would remain on current plans.

Wales – 2 offices would be maintained serving the Military at RAF Valley and QinetiQ at Aberporth. A small office would be required for Observations Network management and the new Public Weather Service consultancy service.

The Office at Belfast would continue to provide services for the military in Northern Ireland, and management and maintenance of the observations network.

### **Defence**

It is intended that there would be improved communication between the Ops Centre and Defence stations to deliver improved consistency in services but there would be no direct impact on staffing levels at Defence stations as a result of the changes in civil production.

### **Delivery of the Project**

There are many strands to the project which would need to be integrated – it is envisaged that the project would be managed by a Programme Board and three individual project strands each led by a Senior Manager.

- Operational Implementation
- People
- Communications

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