Data Communications Company

Consultation Response

Communications Hub Supporting Information changes for incorrect Birth Event Timestamps

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Classification: DCC Public

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1 Introduction

On 13 September 2019, DCC issued a consultation to invite views on changes to the Communication Hub Supporting Information (CHSI) which is a specification under clause 1.5 of the Communications Hub Handover Support Materials (CHHSM). The amendment focused on additions to the Communications Hub (Comms Hub) reset times and processes.

2 Responses to the consultation

The consultation closed on 4 October 2019 and in total three organisations responded. Respondents were all energy suppliers.

Two of the three respondents agreed with and supported the proposed amendment to the CHSI.

One respondent noted that it is beneficial to know the consequences of not following the recommended process, so that the reason behind the process can be re-iterated to Meter Technicians.

One respondent noted that it may not be constructive to make the proposed change to the CHSI until further investigations have been completed and the conditions in which these invalid resets are occurring have been confirmed.

DCC received several questions to the consultation relating to key themes which have been summarised below along with the DCC response.

Cause

Two respondents questioned the cause of the issue.

One of these respondents noted that the consultation document and the CHSI changes do not explain what DCC wishes Users to do differently. It also does not clarify whether the reset behaviour is known to occur:

- during the installation of a Comms Hub;
- during a meter operative visit to site to remediate a malfunctioning Comms Hub; or
- at other times.

The respondent requested clarity on how frequently the invalid resets are occurring, under which conditions such invalid resets are occurring and whether there are particular dates on which they were more prevalent.

The respondent also suggested that, where the issues are occurring during installation, DCC should provide DCC Users with example Comms Hub Function (CHF) Global Unique Identifiers (GUIDs) and the incident dates. This is so Users can investigate if there are particular issues with Suppliers' Comms Hub installation work instructions. If the issues are occurring on remedial site visits, the respondent requested that DCC similarly provide example CHF GUIDs and dates.

Both respondents also noted that the issue may have been caused by an “in-life” Distribution Network Operator (DNO) automatic circuit re-closure, i.e. power “off-on-off-on”, to rectify a local circuit issue.

One respondent noted concerns in relation to Comms Hub not being designed to cope with “normal” Electricity Transmission and DNO operations such as:

1. Auto-recloser operations on Transmission and Distribution overhead line circuits.
2. Network automation schemes which transfer load centres onto alternative feed arrangements when faults trip parts of the network.
3. Low Voltage (LV) feeder sectionalisation under fault conditions.

The respondent noted that all of these operations, which occur automatically throughout the year and much more frequently at times of bad weather, involve the Electricity Smart Metering Equipment (ESME) / Comms Hub being powered off and attempts are made to automatically restore supply to as many customers as possible, as fast as possible. The respondent highlighted that, historically, there is/was a significant reporting threshold of 2 minutes to get customers back on supply which has driven a lot of the design of these systems.

The respondent suggested that it would probably be worth investigating with the relevant DNO if issues are associated with network operations.

DCC response

With regard to the frequency of the reset issue, the DCC can confirm that the Problem has at least 4 related Incidents, however, DCC are unable to isolate and identify all Incidents.

DCC can confirm that the South and Central Communication Service Provider (CSP) has reviewed and triaged the Incidents and related them to the Problem. The CSP’s technical review of the Comms Hub’s logs linked the issue to the installation stage or onsite visits/triaging of equipment.

Some DCC Users have also advised DCC that their installs typically do reboot. For example, one DCC User noted that they couldn’t rule out the possibility of a Comms Hub being seated on to the ESME, then temporarily removed for one reason or another. In some cases, the DCC User power cycles the Comms Hub by taking it off the ESME if they do not get the correct light flashing sequence to indicate that it has birthed properly. The DCC User also noted that they may also power cycle the Comms Hub if they get an N25 or N13 Alert to the first Service Request that they send, but that typically involves pulling the tails from the ESME, which by definition power cycles the Comms Hub.

Regarding a respondent’s suggestion that DCC should provide DCC Users with example GUIDS, DCC can confirm that this has been actioned and will continue to be carried out for any future incidents. Upon identification of this issue, the CSP will open an Incident and will pass on the information to DCC in order to contact the affected DCC User.

Finally, DCC has investigated whether the issues were related to network operations. Whilst noting that DNO matters could cause this issue, this is not something the Central and South CSP have found from investigating the Incidents that have occurred. The CSP views these Incidents as

individual occurrences rather than DNO activity, which they believe would involve more premises. The CSP has also seen other Service Request activity that would link the issue to DCC User installation and triaging activities.

Incident Management

One respondent had questions in relation to the incidents that are triggered as a result of the incorrect Birth Event Timestamp.

Firstly, they noted that the manufacturer date is obviously a lot earlier than the correct Birth Event date. Therefore, they questioned whether a Supplier could be accidently charged higher Comms Hub rental incorrectly due to the Birth Event date going back to the manufacturing date or will the DCC's Incident Management process resolve this.

Secondly, the respondent questioned what the proposed solution is when an incident is triggered. They asked whether the incident could be remedied remotely or whether a potential re-visit to the customer site is required to replace the affected Comms Hub.

DCC response

Upon the identification of misaligned Birth Event dates, the CSP will capture the issues, investigate and amend their Comms Hub database accordingly. Devices would flag as non-compliant when this event occurs and so the CSP would look to ensure Supplier Parties are charged correctly. This is now a faster process due to elements of automation and does not require further site visits.

The Central and South CSP has raised the Incidents to ensure the settings applied by DCC Users are correct, i.e. not in 'Test Bench Mode', and to highlight the issue of reboots not being carried out in accordance with the CHSI guidelines. It is important to note that the Comms Hub functionality is not impacted and only CSP billing and support is affected. The Central and South CSP have a process in place to detect the Comms Hub's wrong Birth Event date and update the record of the Comms Hub with the correct date received in the Comms Hub Status Update (CHSI). Due to the automation of rectifying this issue, the CSP is raising less Incidents when this issue occurs. DCC notes that the amendments to the CHSI should result in less issues, however, if the issue continues to occur, the CSP will look to start logging more Incidents to bring this to the attention of DCC Users.

3 Conclusions

DCC is grateful for the responses received to the consultation. Following review and consideration of these responses, DCC has amended the CHSI.

If you have any further queries, please contact sasha.townsend@smartdcc.co.uk.

4 Next Steps

DCC has published version 1.7 of the CHSI on the DCC website.