COVID-19 and Data Centres
Notes and actions from call 15th May

1   Update from DCMS

This had been a busy week in government. The message had changed from No. 10 with some relaxation of lockdown and businesses were encouraged to resume operations. The furlough scheme was being extended. Workforce guidance was available from gov.uk which provided sector-specific guidance for returning to work, though operators were likely to be ahead of this.

There were plans to introduce some form of quarantine and inputs from the sector had been very welcome. An announcement was not expected before Monday. DCMS would continue to work with colleagues across government as those regulations developed.

The other topic under discussion related to supply chain concerns and DCMS would work with DIT and the sector to try to alleviate delays and blockages. DCMS invited operators to identify particular issues or trends and any steps that would make government intervention more effective.   Trends they had seen elsewhere in other industries suggested that most delays related to high value assets. Was this true of the data centre sector? They would be working on contingencies with industry but no decisions had yet been made and there were no guarantees that supply blockages could be solved by government intervention.

2   Discussion on quarantine: operator observations

- Greatest challenge for supplies was in construction.
- With Schengen borders open, supplies coming via France should not be delayed.
- Operators had questions about the application of quarantine to equipment. Was this likely?
- There was likely to be disproportionate impact on smaller providers because they were less likely to have in-house specialist expertise to call on for some types of installation, repair and maintenance.
- The Channel Islands, currently requiring quarantine, had exemptions in place for workers coming to perform maintenance and repair on communications infrastructure.

- Operators asked whether quarantine could take place within data centres. Data centres were not set up to enable staff to be permanently on site but in some parts of the US teams had taken up temporary residence on the data centre campus during the outbreak.
- The longer quarantine was applied, the higher the associated risks in terms of business continuity, growth and competitiveness and customer service.
- Customer visits were likely to be problematic – most US or Asian customers would at some point make a physical visit to see the facility, perform an audit or send commissioning agents. While measures could be put in place to deal with these issues partially in the short term, eventually it would have an impact.
- The primary impact currently was onboarding rather than sales : enquiries were still being received.
- Issues were most likely to arise if the UK's quarantine restrictions exceeded those elsewhere – so customers might opt for a provider not under quarantine over one in the UK.
- The issue of international geopolitics was raised but operators felt that this was a relatively low risk since overseas customers wanted UK space in order to serve their UK businesses and other domestic customers, and needed to be here to do so.

3   Supply chain

- Members reported that supplies seemed to be opening up which was heartening. The shortage of lower value components seemed to have eased. However, there was heavy dependence on IT commodities and smaller components like cabling, so the potential impact of a shortage could be significant for operations. Factories were working at a slower pace and output was unpredictable. Operators remained concerned about anything not stocked in the UK.
- The most pressing concern was in line with other industries and related to high value equipment that might itself have a long and complex supply chain.
- Operators were concerned about the ability of suppliers, especially small sub-contractors, to bring people back form furlough and to rebuild teams.
- Suppliers were unlikely to be candid about shortages to prevent operators moving orders to other vendors. There were already supply shortages under a no quarantine scenario, which suggested that supply chains would be further impacted if quarantine were imposed.

4   Operator response to lifting of restrictions

- Operators were asked about the impact of the partial lifting of restrictions. They reported no change to operations and that all current restrictions remained in place (see recovery notes) including restrictions to customer access. There had been no relaxation.
- In some cases operators had needed to manage staff expectations about returning to work. The announcement had needed clarifying. Things would not resume with a widespread return to the office on 1st June. Working from home would largely continue.
- Operators were registering staff whose children were returning to school to ensure any increased chances of transmission were factored in to decision making. This had also been a discussion point with staff whose partners were in frontline roles with potential exposure such as in care homes or the NHS.
- Operators were working on an ad hoc basis with those for whom working from home was challenging. In time operators expected that perhaps a quarter of staff would return to the office.

- Changes implemented by operators included new policies on customers and visitors wearing face coverings when entering site. Many operators were recommending this strongly and some were mandating it.
- Operators discussed the issue this presented for security – secondary identification in theory required the removal of a face covering. In some cases this would require a redesign of reception facilities.

5   DCMS Survey

Operators were reminded to complete the DCMS survey. There were many sectors vying for government support and attention. If the department could demonstrate that their interventions on behalf of the sector were effective this would justify further dialogue and support.

6   Testing and tracing

- With the announcement of the approved antibody test, operators were keen to understand how testing would be prioritised. Frontline and healthcare workers would take priority but guidance was expected about key workers.
- Members discussed the tracing app and felt that the key priority was to use the approach that would lead to highest adoption most quickly. Google and Apple were very good at this so members were not sure why UK government had chosen a different approach but were interested to see how it compared.
- Operators were keen to understand whether the tracking and tracing app and the antibody testing would be used in conjunction with quarantine to speed up key worker entry.

ACTION: observations on quarantine to be updated to reflect latest discussion

ACTION: case studies of quarantine exemptions in other countries to be shared

7   Latest documents and links
- Recovery planning overview is here: https://www.techuk.org/insights/news/item/17567-data-centres-and-covid-19-recovery-planning
- Operator observations on quarantine: https://www.techuk.org/insights/meeting-notes/item/17564-data-centres-and-covid-19

- Latest Uptime Report: Pandemic Planning and response: a guide for critical infrastructure
- Details of testing supplier: https://www.techuk.org/insights/news/item/17565-data-centres-and-covid-19-testing
- Sample corporate guidance on PPE: https://www.techuk.org/insights/news/item/17563-data-centres-and-covid-19-more-on-ppe
- Returning to work: official guidance: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-guidance-launched-to-help-get-brits-safely-back-to-work
- TFL guidance: https://tfl.gov.uk/campaign/coronavirus-covid-
- Testing information: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-getting-tested
- Data centre COVID-19 page: https://www.techuk.org/covid-19-information-hub/data_centres
- techUK COVID-19 info hub: https://www.techuk.org/covid-19-information-hub

- DCMS mailbox: COVID-data-resilience@culture.gov.uk for queries from data centre operators, suppliers and stakeholders

8   Next call: Friday 22nd May

The next call was scheduled for Friday 22nd May, 9.30.

9   ACTIONS

ACTION: observations on quarantine to be updated to reflect latest discussion

ACTION: case studies of quarantine exemptions in other countries to be shared

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