

COVID-19 and Data Centres

Notes from regular operator catch-up, 19th June 2020

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1 Update from DCMS

The DCMS team was unable to join the call but had briefed the Data Centres Council at length two days earlier. A summary was provided, as follows:

- The dedicated team established in March had advocated very successfully on behalf of the sector on key worker status, construction site protection and quarantine exemption.
- The team was funded for a year from July 2019 with a broad remit to protect sector resilience and competitiveness. It would initially comprise 5 members, though this might change depending on the scope of activity needed and other Government priorities.
- There had also been an information-gathering exercise and, with the help of input from operators, a report was being finalised. This would direct the team's work for the next 12 months. Essentially, priorities were:
 - Guaranteeing the future security of the sector
 - Fostering and accommodating sector growth
 - Protecting sector competitiveness
 - Application and interpretation of environmental policy
 - Assessing medium term impacts of health measures on parts and labour
 - Access to skills
 - Competitive status of the UK market

2 Operator discussion: National Data Centre Strategy

With the new DCMS team in place, policy making was likely to be more strategic. It was essential that the sector was closely engaged in policy developments that impacted operators. Some countries, such as Norway, had developed national data centre strategies. Members agreed that this was a good opportunity for the sector to set out what good would look like in terms of a national data centre strategy, and that this could be used to inform policy. Operators discussed the different elements that such a strategy should cover. The overall objective was better integration of the sector into government thinking so that policy decisions henceforward would be properly informed.

a Critical infrastructure status

- The discussion around data centres as part of critical infrastructure should not be binary and should include the option to create something new rather than be bound by existing classification routes. Members felt that this was a perfect opportunity to move away from existing models.
- Members should use comparisons with other countries including feedback on what had gone well and what had not, to aid decision making

b Security and resilience

- It was important to compare definitions to ensure that what government meant by security and resilience was understood by operators, and vice versa. It was essential that the sector and government had a common understanding of the terminology being used.
- The sector needed to ensure that government and other stakeholders understood how resilience was currently delivered and the security levels that operators could handle in terms of sensitive data.
- The sector already worked to multiple common standards relating to security and resilience, such as 27001, 22301, etc.

c Markets and sector growth

- The sector needed to communicate market information to government to ensure policy makers were aware of growth drivers and growth opportunities, especially how the demands of hyperscalers and CSPs were impacting the market in terms of volume and demand.
- The sector needed to brief government on future technology trends relevant to the market to ensure these were accommodated in policy decisions. Plenty of existing collateral was available, such as the CBRE quarter marketview reports, and those from other analysts.
- It was important to emphasise that data centre builds do not have to be boring boxes: postcards from the edge series could be developed to showcase some of the more impressive and creative data centre designs, both architecturally and in terms of sustainable design.

d Sustainability

- Operators had to be clear about energy consumption and broader sustainability impacts such as eWaste, have mitigation policies in place and strategies for contributing to net zero.
- Reference to the array of sustainability standards in common use should be made

e Building competency within government

- Before the establishment of the DCMS team, level of awareness was very low within government, among politicians and civil servants alike.
- This was changing and recent developments presented the sector with a perfect opportunity to help government build a knowledge base.
- The sector should set out what a national data centre roadmap should look like and how this could help to guarantee the future of the data infrastructure sector in the UK. This was the best starting point for strategic engagement with government.
- The sector could demonstrate that competitors already worked together collaboratively and productively on issues of common concern, and had been doing so for a decade.

3 Next steps

An straw man to be produced of the elements that a sector strategy should include, that could be used as a framework for discussion with government.

The next call was scheduled for Friday 3rd July at 09.30

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