

## **Dr Jennifer Bealt, David Powell and Professor Duncan Shaw, University of Manchester – Written evidence (RSK0068)**

1. This document addresses Questions 9 and 10 of The House of Lords Select Committee on Risk Assessment and Risk Planning. In addressing Question 9, the document focuses on the **role of the individual** in relation to national crises and the benefits of **increasing public involvement** in emergency planning. This includes consideration of communities as an overlooked national resilience capability. In addressing Question 10, this document addresses **lessons learnt** from the COVID-19 pandemic for approaches to risk planning and risk assessment, and the role of **exercising to test risk preparedness**.
2. The submission has been developed from 65 interviews with experts in local government, emergency planning, risk and resilience on response and recovery to COVID-19 since April 2020. Insights have also been developed from participation in over 300 online response and recovery meetings across three local government areas in the UK. Additional understanding has been garnered through our development of '**The Manchester Briefing**'<sup>1</sup>, which collates international lessons learnt from response, recovery and renewal from COVID-19.
3. The research which informs this submission is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), as part of UK Research and Innovation's rapid response to Covid-19 (Project number: ES/V015346/1), and by The University of Manchester. The views presented here are those of the authors, and are not representative of the funders.

### **Question 9: The role of the individual**

#### **4. *Talk about the preparedness of individuals***

The term 'resilience' is often bandied about especially in regard to individuals and communities. Resilience is something all parts of societies strive for. It is a fluid and ever-moving state, and should therefore be considered on a continuum, rather than a final destination that any system can attain, as its very nature requires that systems continually improve and adapt.

Additionally, not all people are resilient – they are not able to resist or absorb or adapt to shocks and stressors, and they require support and assistance.

5. In contrast, 'preparedness' is a less vague concept. Everyone can engage with some form of preparedness activities, whether this is ensuring they have an up-to-date list of their medications, or keeping an emergency 'grab bag' filled with essential items in case of evacuation. Preparedness leads to

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.alliancembs.manchester.ac.uk/news/recovering-from-covid-19/>

conversation of what can we prepare – and, in the context of a disaster, this is the vehicle through which we begin our journey toward becoming more resilient.

6. Encouraging preparedness at individual and organisational levels reduces the pressures on local responders and authorities, and balances out the responsibilities of risk planning between local government, their partners and individual members of the public. This thinking helps to shift risk planning towards 'capabilities' thinking, and away from the driving paradigm that risks, and therefore vulnerabilities, are based on the likelihood of an event multiplied by its impact. Capabilities are, thus, the moderator of risk and need to be considered when we think about likelihood and impact.

7. ***The primacy of response to emergencies is community capability***

When a crisis occurs, the primacy of impact is often with individuals, but the primacy of response is with organisations, groups and associations. This is an important distinction to make to understand how capabilities can be realised during a crisis. We often use the term 'community resilience', but rarely consider the building blocks of a community. In overlooking this, we overlook the specific capabilities different segments of the community may have, and the uniqueness of these. We therefore consider the community to be comprised of:

1. Individual people
2. Individual organisations
3. Individual community groups
4. Associations and groups made up of the above

8. Risk assessment and planning should therefore consider the capabilities of these individual sections of community, and consider the capabilities of groups of these individuals when they form multi-stakeholder associations.

9. ***Co-produce risk plans because different communities start from a different states of preparedness***

Not all communities are in the same place nor have the same capabilities. Local government is central to support communities during a crises, but there are opportunities to co-produce the type of support (or solutions) needed with communities who are much better acquainted with locale-specific information on local risk profiles, and have a wealth of skills and experiences that can inform community response and strengthen preparedness activities.

10. This can build on (or even start conversations) with people to help them understand and appreciate their own local risks, their potential vulnerabilities or isolation, and the societal networks (capabilities) that are locally available to help support or mitigate vulnerability to risks and their impacts. In turn, this can highlight the gaps in capabilities, and can inform planning assumptions regarding where assistance is required.

11. For those who are able, this can encourage self-reliance, and help to distribute responsibility for preparedness and risk mitigation between people

and organisations. Co-produced responsibilities for preparedness can be led by local governments to involve *all* in society through actions, for example:

- continue to build public engagement with (and co-production around) risk assessment and planning to build trust and support transparency and compliance
- incorporate and capitalise on local knowledge and intelligence as a critical and effective way of identifying and supporting the most vulnerable
- develop the preparedness activities of community partners to support resilience building
- develop preparedness at the individual level to ensure people are aware of their vulnerabilities and ways to mitigate these
- provide support structures and training for volunteers as part of national capability

### 12. **Community preparedness as a national resilience capability**

The response to COVID-19 has clearly shown that our communities were an essential national resilience capability. In some local governments this was designed into their plans which included their voluntary and community sector response, and part of which was established on the spot to address gaps. Throughout the pandemic individuals and communities, in their roles as first and prolonged responders, have undertaken invisible acts of good neighbourliness, volunteered in their hundreds of thousands, and provided visible donations (including from large and small business/organisations). This has been coordinated by local government, voluntary sector, and linchpins in communities. Conceivably, this preparedness of the community to respond has lowered the impacts of the devastating virus.

13. The capabilities of individuals and communities to do this over time has been possible as a result of:

- vulnerability to COVID-19 being felt by all members of the public – creating a deeper understanding of personal vulnerability and how to prepare and mitigate risk
- prolonged engagement of individuals with risk information – information about COVID-19 that has been communicated by officials including risk assessment and mitigations
- exposed weaknesses in society and systems – that has required individuals, communities, and local government to respond and help

14. Formalising these capabilities as part of planning our national resilience capability can help build structures and systems that are more prepared for crises. This may be through:

- train responders on how to lead community and voluntary responses
- develop formalised, well-tested procedures and online management systems to support volunteer coordination
- build on existing guidance<sup>2</sup> to enhance local governments' and voluntary organisations' ability to work with community to build capabilities, including on:

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<sup>2</sup><https://www.iso.org/search.html?q=Security%20and%20resilience%20%E2%80%94%20Community%20resilience>

- volunteers, such as ISO 22319:2017 Guidelines for planning the involvement of spontaneous volunteers, and the Civil Contingency Secretariat's guidance for spontaneous volunteers
- supporting vulnerable people, such as ISO 22395:2018 Guidelines for supporting vulnerable persons in an emergency, and the Civil Contingency Secretariat's guidance on vulnerable people

#### **15. Need to increase public awareness of, and involvement in, emergency planning**

Community knowledge can be leveraged to integrate local expertise into risk assessment and planning to help plan for, and address, specific local risks and needs. Co-producing risk planning with communities so that they are a part of risk management, increases legitimacy and familiarity with: the risk, partnerships with organisations and agencies, appropriate preparedness/response activities, and the role of risk planning and its limitations. To aid this, individuals and communities are well-placed to:

- provide information on local risks
- provide local insights into what may or may not work in communicating risk to the community, thereby informing efforts for compliance, transparency and legitimacy
- stress test/challenge planning assumptions about how people will respond or react to crisis
- provide information on, and account for, vulnerabilities pre- and post-emergency (including inequalities and inequities e.g. race, gender, socio-economic background, sexuality)
- highlight where community capacity exists to support response and recovery, and develop local self-help/resilience/response support networks – that, if accounted for in risk planning, could be offered support

#### **16. Enhancing the public's awareness of risks can be achieved through:**

- holding meaningful conversations around meaningful community risk registers with communities, businesses, families and individuals about the most likely risks they should prepare for. A good example is the locally-driven East Coast Flood Group<sup>3</sup> in Lincolnshire, which encouraged preparedness and resilience based on a communal understanding that that resources would need to be prioritised and could not provide universal support due to stretched resources
- educating individuals about the likely impacts and responses, so that they are galvanised into taking reasonable steps for their own preparedness, and better understand how to access support where needed – either from their own networks or via support providers in the public, private or third sector.

### **Question 10**

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<sup>3</sup><https://lincolnshire.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s3732/East%20Coast%20Flood%20Group%20Appendix%20A.pdf>

### **17. Lessons learnt about the approach to risk assessment and risk planning**

We identified challenges for risk assessment and planning through interviews with people with expertise in emergency planning including:

- Former Chief Executive (*Local Authority*)
- Former Resilience and Response Manager (*Emergency Planning*)
- Business Continuity, Security (*Risk Management*)

18. Interviewees raised the issues of limited guidance relating to completing risk assessments or risk planning document, and difficulties of local government in accessing risk registers (*Risk Management interviewee*). Many Local Resilience Forums published spreadsheets of risk matrixes covering every conceivable risk (most had upwards of 100+), rather than breaking them down to the most obvious or most likely risks. Sign up to early warning systems like 'flood warnings direct' also remained inexplicably low.

19. In addition, organisations with the potential for increased levels of institutional memory, such as Category 1 and 2 responders, were not adequately considered in risk planning, and there was limited understanding of the flexibility of Category 1 and 2 responders' in supporting areas where capabilities were strained (*Risk Management*). In addition, risk planning was perceived to require increased integration of localised scientific/health advisors at local government level (*Risk Management*) and increased guided scenario planning on identified risks (*Local Authority*).

20. Finally, risk planning may be supported through increased integration of risks and threats in the civil contingency risk register, and a standardised language across local authorities (*Local Authority*). This would help prepare organisations for concurrent emergencies, for example, a health crisis such as COVID-19, in tandem with a natural disaster or terrorist incident (*Emergency Planning*).

### **21. Approaches to assessing resilience capabilities**

COVID-19 has exposed the fragilities of our systems and our national capabilities. There are theories of systems which can help to manage the complexity of risks, and assess the capabilities of the system, by considering 5 broad, yet interconnected systems<sup>4</sup>. The 5 systems that should be considered for developing resilience capabilities are:

- a) Strategy, vision and leadership
- b) Intelligence
- c) Management of processes, systems and planning, including audit
- d) Coordination and communication of operations
- e) Delivery of operations

22. Resilience capabilities can, and should, be interrogated to learn lessons on how to enhance each of the 5 systems. Developing resilience capability can

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<sup>4</sup> Applying systems thinking at times of crisis <https://systemsthinking.blog.gov.uk/author/dr-gary-preece/>

be facilitated by learning lessons from COVID-19 so that the resilience capabilities can be further developed and embedded.

### **23. *Role of exercising to test risk preparedness***

Exercising to test preparedness plays a central role in understanding the extent of vulnerabilities in a community, where capabilities can be supported and built, and for testing the capabilities an organisation believes it has. Exercising to test risk preparedness can also shed light on the successes and challenges of preparation activities and education within the community to elucidate where capabilities need to be built, and potential pressure points on response.

24. The importance of testing risk preparedness was described in interviews we collected with local authorities in the UK. One Former Chief Executive stated that their authority had pandemic plans but they did not exercise them due to a lack of funding and high staff turnover which resulted in a lack of institutional memory (*Former Local Authority Chief Executive*). However, exercising plans should not be confined to table-top exercises for government and Category 1 and 2 responders. They also need to be exercised with the public to understand capabilities, test critical timelines, and identify vulnerable persons that may otherwise be overlooked in planning. In turn, this helps to raise the public's awareness of risks, and to educate them about their own levels of preparedness and exposures to risk. It also helpfully exposes responders to public involvement, and provides insights into real-life scenarios for responders, including the impacts of the public on response, which helps to challenge risk planning assumptions.
25. Risk preparedness planning can be exercised with the four sections of community identified at the beginning of this document (Individual people, organisations, community groups, and combined association of these three). This can provide insights into previously unknown resilience capabilities that have yet to be explored or tested.

*28 January 2021*