Wiltshire and Swindon Local Resilience Forum – Written evidence (RSK0091)

Question 1

What are the most significant extreme risks that the UK faces? Are these kinds of risks discrete, linked or systemic? What do you understand the term 'extreme risk' to mean?

The most significant risks that the UK faces are common to most nations' risks, Pandemic Flu, emerging infectious diseases, large scale loss of electrical supply, loss of telecommunications and severe weather events, in the UK notably being flooding, severe cold and snow and heatwaves. Several of these risks are linked, in that a failure of the electricity transmission system would severely affect telecommunications and other utilities including water and gas supplies. Severe weather events are linked by the common factor that with climate change we can expect more severe weather events occurring more frequently. Emerging infectious diseases may also be more likely due to climate change increasing the interface between humans and wild animals, thus increasing the risk of new variants or new diseases developing.

There are currently several malicious risks that relate to Cyber. It would be helpful to link some of these together in a more wide-ranging Cyber Impacts risk accepting that each has a specific impact on certain sectors, but the impacts can often be far reaching and similar.

The term "Extreme Risk" is not used in the Wiltshire and Swindon Local Resilience Forum (LRF). Risks are scaled on an ascending scale from low, to medium, high and very high. A risk could be considered to be extreme if the impacts threatens serious damage to human welfare in a place in the UK, the environment of a place in the UK, or war or terrorism which threatens serious damage to the security of the UK.

Question 2

Are there types of risks to which the UK is particularly vulnerable or for which it is poorly prepared? What are the reasons for this?

The UK, like other "developed" countries is particularly vulnerable to failure of the National electrical transmission system. The National Grid and electricity generating companies have plans and procedures in place to minimise the risk, and response plans if there is a failure. Many Local Resilience Forums have prepared Utility Failure Guides and have carried out walkthroughs and exercises. However due to the extent of the impacts of a failure of the electrical transmission system, including disrupting key national infrastructure, it is extremely difficult to protect all vulnerable members of society, and many

individuals and indeed companies have no personal emergency plans or business continuity plans that would help them to manage the issues. In Wiltshire and Swindon, an in-house booklet entitled "Are You Ready", with a template "Personal Emergency Plan" has been produced and has been promoted on the LRF Website and at the local Emergency Services Show. However, it must be recognised that many residents may not be aware of this initiative. Sponsorship and promotion on a National Level of personal and family emergency plans would assist in increasing individual and family's resilience and therefore the UK's emergency preparedness.

The UK is also very vulnerable to the risk of the failure of critical government contractors, e.g. Carillion and of the risk of the failure of large residential care home groups e.g. Southern Cross Healthcare. The procurement of government contracts and the ongoing monitoring of the financial health of the contractors is a Central Government responsibility and it is important that this is carried out in a transparent manner. Local Authorities procure many placements at residential care homes, and through their procurement processes are able to monitor the financial status of the homes they deal with, however it might be considered of benefit if large residential care groups were monitored at a national level and the information then made available to Local Authorities.

Question 3

How could the Government's approach to risk assessment be strengthened to ensure that it is rigorous, wide-ranging and consistent? Your answer could refer to any aspect of the risk assessment process including, for example, its governance, the evidence base, or the degree to which it is open to scrutiny and the input of experts.

Risk Assessment and management has been evolving in the last 10 years with increasing consultation with Local Resilience Forums and the setting up of the National Risk Working Group. Consultations on updating the NSRA were carried out in 2019 with LRFs. The setting up of Cross Border Risk Groups in each part of the UK to compare and share good practice would improve consistency. These Groups could then feed into the National Risk Working Group. The setting up of the H41(LRF and devolved Administration) National Power Outage Virtual Group and the Pandemic Flu LRF Engagement Group were both positive moves that were welcomed by LRFs and it is hoped that virtual meetings will resume when possible after the pandemic. It would be helpful to have more information on UK capabilities against specific risks and threats. Whilst LRFs are aware of local and even regional support it is less clear what the national response would be to support risk planning and assessment, particularly for risks that have extensive national planning in place. This increased knowledge could be cascaded using ResilienceDirect and through liaison meetings between Government Department or industry subject matter experts and the LRFs and local partners.

Question 4

Given the range of possible national risks, and the need to achieve a balance between efficiency and resilience, what level of assurance should the Government be seeking on the UK's resilience to hazards? What would effective national risk management achieve, and how could its success be measured?[1]

Assurance could be potentially a two-way process by which feedback and scrutiny is given from a Government level as well as from LRFs and the public. Benchmarking with other National Risk Registers and National Security Risk Assessments would help with capturing good practice and it is understood that this has been undertaken. Effective national risk management facilitates the assessment of risks at National and Local Resilience Forum levels as well as enabling the Government and LRF's to inform the public and businesses on potential risks and mitigations that can be taken at all levels. Success can be measured by the level of risk awareness and preparation at all levels, which can be monitored with assessments questionnaires and audits.

Question 5

How can the Government ensure that it identifies and considers as wide a range of risks as possible? What risks does the inclusion criteria for the National Security Risk Assessment exclude and what effect does this have on long-term resilience?

Liaison with Local Resilience Forums as well as different industrial sectors is a useful method of ensuring that risks are appropriately identified. Some risks are local rather than national, and the NSRA does not provide any information on these. An example is Major Pollution of Groundwater, which many LRFs assess but without up to date national guidance, thus meaning that the assessments differ greatly across LRFs. Many of these local risks would have a high impact on the local areas assessing them and help guide the LRFs in planning their training and exercising and work programmes. Also, as many of the responders such as the Environment Agency cover multiple LRF areas, this makes assessment more difficult. Having either a section on the NSRA with a suite of "Local" Risks, or a Local Risk Sharing area set up on ResilienceDirect for use by LRFs Nationally would greatly assist. Locally, hosted by Hampshire & Isle of Wight LRF, Wiltshire and Swindon LRF, and Thames Valley LRF together with other LRFs in the South West and South East take part in regular Cross Border Risk Meetings to share information, exchange views and identify good practice, processes and assessment templates. Risk assessments, particularly new risks to the NSRA are shared amongst the LRFs attending and common risk assessments that could be used by any LRFs are prepared.

Question 6

How effectively do current ways of characterising risks (for example, the use of a five-point scoring system of a 'reasonable worst case scenario') support evidence-based policy decisions? What other information would be useful?

The five point scoring system for impacts is in effect a six point system as there is an option to score the impact at 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5. A five point score for likelihood is used from 1 to 5, and national guidance provided on the weighting of impact scores . The scale together with the weighting has been found from the perspective of Wiltshire and Swindon LRF to be effective when used in assessing risks. The "reasonable worst-case scenarios" are useful as they provide a standard level of measurement that LRFs can use, taking into consideration local demographics and geography. The scales allow risks to be clearly identified, with the areas that may be most impacted such as Economic or Environmental, and this greatly assists in the targeting of activity to mitigate against potential impacts. The national impact scores available on the NSRA are very useful in providing a basis for local impact scoring.

Question 7

How effectively do Departments mitigate risks? Does the Risk Assessment process and the Civil Contingencies Secretariat adequately support Government departments to address risks within their remits? Is further oversight or accountability required, and if so, what form should that take?

No comment as return is completed by an LRF not a Government Department.

Question 8

How well are national contingency plans communicated to and understood by those at a local level, including emergency responders? What could be changed to increase the capability of local responders to effectively plan for and respond to emergencies?

Regarding communication of national contingency plans, the MHCLG, through the Resilience Emergencies Division advisors take part in LRF meetings and provide National updates, and this interface is extremely useful and valued by LRFs. Appropriate plans and guidance are provided using ResilienceDirect and on the .gov.uk website. The utilities, who are Category 2 Responders under the Civil Contingencies Act (CCA) 2004 have been working with LRFs to enhance understanding of utility failure and resumption plans. Although the CCA places an obligation on Category 2 Responders (Cat 2's), whom include the utilities, to share information with other responders, however due to commercial sensitivities, there may be reluctance regarding the level of information that is sometimes supplied. A strengthening of the requirement regarding sharing of information by Cat 2's may assist in planning and the subsequent management of incidents. Bearing this in mind, it is still very important that awareness of national capability to support local planning is cascaded in a structured and timeous manner.

Regarding increasing capability of local responders, there is an accepted view in Wiltshire and Swindon LRF that resilience must start with the individual and community level and build upwards. LRFs are the solid foundation on which to build the "local". Consequently, they must be properly funded with an appropriate funding formula. There are differences between the amount of resources that LRF areas are able to put into LRFs, and a standard central funding formula, with a minimum funding that is increased utilising a formula that may take into consideration factors such as population size, area of LRF and demographics could be developed with the assistance of LRFs.

Question 9

What is the role of the individual in relation to national crises? Are there potential benefits in increasing public involvement and transparency in emergency planning? What limitations are there to this? What lessons have been learnt or should have been learnt about the approach taken to risk assessment and risk planning in this country from the COVID-19 pandemic?

The Covid 19 Pandemic has illustrated the significant role that individuals play during national crises. There are significant benefits from increasing public involvement, notably a greater understanding of what assistance is available and the limitations on that support. Preparation to foster resilience is crucial, and locally we promote two booklets "What are the Risks" and "Are You Ready?" Many responders feel that further guidance and strengthening of the BBC role of Connecting in a Crisis would be of benefit. Harnessing the support of the Voluntary sector is critical in order to create further capacity within the resilience community. Wiltshire and Swindon LRF promote, and have available on the LRF website, the "Susie the Childminder books". These were created by Hampshire and Isle of Wight Local Resilience Forum, with funding from DEFRA, to help young people to understand risks such as flood, fire, snow and ice. In the United States of America, FEMA, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, has an excellent section to inform and involve young people in emergency management. https: ready.gov/kids Young people are positive influencers and can initiate planning in families, and through time, resilience throughout society. Having a similar national resource as the USA ready.gov/kids in the UK could be a very positive action.

Question 10

What challenges are there in developing resilience capability? Your answer could refer to critical infrastructure, but also to systems and networks beyond those elements. What is the role of exercising to test risk preparedness, and are these methods utilised effectively in risk assessment and risk planning in this country?

Resources are a major constraint as the personnel who are developing resilience are often the same personnel who are responding to incidents. The Category One responders have very constrained budgets and the Voluntary Agencies that

support the LRFs are in many cases facing greatly increased demand with decreased donations. Exercising must be prioritised and tailored because it is impossible to run exercises for each possible risk. Exercises must be designed to include the maximum number of common consequences that could arise from a number of different risks, e.g. the setting up of a rest centre and a command and control structure could be required for a rail crash or a major fire.

Another challenge to the development of resilience capability is the sensitivity of the information held by data owners and the sharing of this using appropriate platforms. Information sharing protocols and secure information sharing systems such as ResilienceDirect are important enablers that assist in the appropriate sharing of information. Prior to incidents, it is important to carry out planning and preparation activities including training responders in the use of ResilienceDirect, an identification of useful information and any barriers to accessing the information.

Question 11

What can be learnt from local or corporate risk management processes, or those of other countries? Are there any specific examples of practices, processes or considerations which could improve the UK's national risk resilience? How could businesses and civil society more effectively support national resilience preparation?

Wiltshire and Swindon Local Resilience Forum utilises a localised version of the NSRA Risk Assessment template, with two additional areas that are considered, climate change and equality and fairness. With climate change we consider whether climate change may increase or decrease the likelihood of the risk occurring within the next ten years, and whether climate change may cause an increase or decrease of any of the impacts over the next ten years. The Met Office has been and continues to be a great support to the LRF through the Met Office Advisors (Civil Contingencies) and their expertise in providing context and professional guidance. With regard to equality and fairness, we consider whether any demographic group is disproportionately affected by this Risk; for example, residents in care homes or any other group with protected characteristics. If a group is identified that would be disproportionately affected, we investigate whether any additional mitigations need to be developed, or amendments to plans or guides or other documents made. On a general note, risk assessment training could be made centrally available for those charged with delivering risk in LRFs, potentially similar to the excellent "Think Cyber – Think Resilience" seminars that were run from 2018 to 2020.

The Voluntary Agencies have been a tremendous support to the Category One Responders in managing local resilience issues. In Wiltshire and Swindon, the Voluntary Agencies are a valued group that are involved in LRF meetings and activities.

A greater promotion of themed weeks or events such as the Business Continuity Awareness Week that is run in May each year, in 2021 from 17th to 21st May, would assist small, medium and large organisations in improving their resilience.

Question 12

What individual or economic behaviours would strengthen national resilience against hazards, and what mechanisms are open to the Government or society to incentivise these behaviours? How should we prioritise any changes required in approach, process or policy needed to improve risk mitigation and strengthen the UK's resilience to extreme risks and emergencies?

There are many "soft Engineering" behaviours or economic incentives that could be put in place that could reduce the likelihood and impact of many hazards. These have several benefits, for example: improving the environment, protecting wildlife and reducing flood risk and improving soil quality and increasing carbon capture. Examples of soft engineering are:

- tree planting to retain water in the upper reaches of river catchments,
- river management,
- water butts fitted to each appropriate house,
- protection and improvement of the health of peatlands,
- management of peatlands,

Behavioural Changes:

- Encourage an increase in number of flood and gulley wardens,
- Encouragement of more community help groups,
- Encouragement of more individuals and families to prepare personal emergency plans.

There are economic behaviours that can help reduce climate change, improve air quality and help protect the UK against the impacts of the risk of electrical failure:

- Incentives to increase the number of electric vehicles and reduce the number of petrol and diesel vehicles in use in the UK,
- Incentivise "vehicle to grid" systems that can assist in maintain the National Grid and assist in recovery from electrical failure.

The built environment contributes around 40% of the UK's total carbon footprint. Greenhouse gas emissions in the UK in 2018 from construction were 13,849.1 thousand metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent according to statista.com. This is an area where policy can have a significant effect in reducing the UK's carbon footprint, and this the UK's part in combating climate change. House builders can be part of the solution, and positive engagement at a national level can benefit the environment, reduce the likelihood the likelihood and/or impact of flooding. By financially incentivising the speeding up the delivery of new housing, and penalising excess "land-banking" and failure to build on land where planning applications have been granted, should result in an increase in the available housing stock.

A few other potential actions that would help national resilience:

- Construction of new houses required to meet even more enhanced standards for energy efficiency,
- Requirement for all new housing with garages or parking on own land to have electric car charging points and vehicle to grid systems,
- Requirements that all new housing with gardens to have water butts,
- New housing sites to increase the Carbon Capture footprint by planting mature trees not saplings,
- Protection of the Green Space by allocating the Community Infrastructure Levy (CiL) to Brown-Field sites,
- Future projections of flood risk or coastal erosion taking climate change into consideration should be used when assessing the viability of new house building. Historical data may be presented at present, when it is becoming increasingly clear that taking an average over 100 years has little relevance, when for example we have experienced eleven of the twelve warmest years on record since 2000. We have experiencing several one in a hundred years events in the last decade.
- Reduction / removal of Planning Inspectors ability to overrule Local Authority decisions to build on flood plains or near cliffs edges that have been judged as inappropriate,
- House Builders restricted on making new applications for houses until a set proportion of applications that have already been granted have been built or started. House Builders charged for properties that construction is started, but then paused, and these paused properties counting towards quota of not used planning applications.

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