



**NATIONAL  
PREPAREDNESS  
COMMISSION**

# Building Everyday Preparedness

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National Preparedness Commission

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper brings together findings from a two-year programme of research commissioned by the National Preparedness Commission on community resilience. In doing so, it addresses an underdeveloped element of a whole-of-society approach to emergency preparedness – being prepared to be prepared, or ‘everyday preparedness.’ The UK faces a wide range of potential risks in an increasingly complex and unstable world. This paper adopts a threat-agnostic stance, articulating principles and practices which should support individuals, households and communities whatever hazards happen.

Alignment of goals within and between communities and the state, at various levels, is important for resilience but cannot always be assumed. The legislative framework for civil contingencies now appears dated. It places no obligation on statutory authorities to engage meaningfully or mutually with communities on emergency preparedness, meaning such engagement varies dramatically by locality.

At its heart, everyday preparedness happens locally. It relies on strong relationships of trust built up in advance of a crisis between the leaders of communities, emergency services and civic institutions. There is no substitute for these personal relationships and they cannot be built overnight, let alone when a major incident is already underway. At a grassroots level too, positive relationships characterised by respect and reciprocity create the social capital and cohesion needed to make a community resilient. Such a community will also take care to mitigate the risk of an emergency exacerbating existing inequalities. They look to prevent a crisis from disproportionately affecting marginalised groups or leaving vulnerable individuals open to exploitation. This is the social and cultural infrastructure on which community resilience rests.

This paper lays out steps that individuals and families can take to make their own households more resilient, including reducing their reliance on technology, which may not be available when disaster strikes. It discusses the merits of following Sweden’s example in ensuring widespread dissemination of actionable information and guidance throughout the UK population. For those charged with leadership roles in an emergency, there is advice for learning from the survivors of previous incidents, coordinating volunteers and optimising donations. Insights into communicating effectively in a crisis are highlighted, including listening empathetically and relaying memorable messages that are honest and informed. Further suggestions on the roles that businesses, both big and small, can play in resilient communities are also provided.

The paper concludes with a pragmatic set of proposals for government, residents and organisations across the public, private and voluntary sectors to build resilience in our communities. If implemented, they would make a material contribution to everyday preparedness in the UK.

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## INTRODUCTION

His Majesty's Government refreshed its Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy (*HMG 2023b*) this year, updating the version published two years ago (*HMG 2021*). It laid out the UK's approach to 'a more contested and volatile world' of climate breakdown and geopolitical multipolarity. Against this backdrop of global instability, British society is complex, densely networked and heavily reliant on technology, meaning external shocks can cause 'cascades of concatenated failure when one link in the chain is broken' (*IPPR 2009*). Meanwhile, late-stage capitalism has ushered in a gig economy in services and lean production in goods which allow no room for redundancy, resulting in 'a just-in-time culture with little heed for just-in-case' (*ibid*).

A wide range of potential risks might be realised in the UK, many of which are documented in the National Risk Register (*HMG 2023c*). They include, for example, a pandemic, cyber-attack, sabotage, suicide bomber, hijacking, hostage taking, marauding shooter, weapon of mass destruction, train crash, industrial accident, fire, strike, riot, space weather, heatwave or a flood caused by river, coastal or surface water (*BRC 2022*). There are also so-called 'Black Swan' events which are less predictable. Moreover, with the global and the local now so closely interwoven, events may occur overseas that have an impact on our shores, such as the recent upturns in antisemitic and Islamophobic criminality in the UK, the US and elsewhere following the atrocities perpetrated by Hamas in October and Israel's siege of Gaza in response.

Each risk can be gauged in terms of its likelihood, impact and duration. To complicate matters, some hazards transmute over time from one state to another. For example, the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in what is now Ukraine posed an acute threat to life when it went into meltdown in 1986; but it also poses a chronic risk for years to come, with Russian soldiers invading Ukraine reportedly exposed to elevated levels of radiation when digging trenches inside its exclusion zone last year.

It is in this context that the National Preparedness Commission (NPC) has, over the past two years, been exploring community preparedness as an underdeveloped aspect of the whole-of-society approach to resilience now espoused by the UK government (see *Persson 2021; Dunmore 2022; Scully and Shaw 2022a-c; Stober 2022; Barnes 2023; Drury and Ntontis 2023; NPC 2023; Scully, Shaw and Powell 2023*). It has been asking what contributions individuals, households, communities and civil society as a whole can make to the national resilience agenda.

This paper collates and supplements the learning from that programme of research to describe how ordinary people in the UK can anticipate and prepare for crises, respond to them when they happen, and recover from them afterwards. It recognises that recovery might not be linear and does not necessarily mean returning to how things were.

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## ON THE SAME PAGE?

An important pre-condition of effective community preparedness – but one which cannot be taken for granted – is alignment between the community’s interests and those of the government. If the government is pulling in the opposite direction from the community in a crisis, resilience is undermined. An example of such a tension would be the miners’ strike of 1984-85, when some community members taking food and other supplies to striking miners’ families, were turned back on the road by police. Mutual Aid – which saw a resurgence during the Covid-19 pandemic (*Drury and Ntontis 2023*) – began as an anarchic movement in the 19th Century and burgeoned during the AIDS epidemic of the late 20th Century with members who were often distrusting of the state. More recently, we witnessed the incongruity of the country’s top scientists encouraging people to maintain social distance and minimise physical contact to avoid transmitting a dangerous coronavirus, whilst senior government leaders demonstrated conversely different public behaviours and attitudes, including the then Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, openly shaking hands with people on hospital ward visits (*BBC 2021*).

International examples of tension between state and people are starker still. When the levees were breached in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina in 2005, some members of the Black community were stopped by police from crossing bridges to get out, with fatal consequences. In Libya’s Derna, where recent floods killed thousands, the local authorities had long neglected the upkeep of the two dams which eventually burst upstream, despite repeated warnings that they could give way.

Sometimes different parts of the state are at odds with one another, leaving the community stuck in the middle. Again, in Derna, after the waters rose, different local authorities issued contradictory advice to residents: both to evacuate and to observe a curfew. A domestic example would be in the lead-up to Christmas 2020, when the London Borough of Greenwich advised schools in its local authority area to close because of Covid-19, which was promptly contradicted by the national Secretary of State for Education who decreed the schools should stay open. Pupils’ parents were left confused and frustrated, while broader trust and confidence in the state was undermined.

Crises can also lead to friction between the freedoms of some members of the community and the health and safety of others, as the Covid-19 pandemic demonstrated. The state may need to regulate the situation to strike an appropriate balance between different groups’ competing interests. In extreme circumstances, such as a deadly contagion, it may need to do this by force, for example by imposing mass quarantine on an infected community in the face of civil disorder (*IPPR 2008*).

On other occasions, advice from an arm of the state can have unintended consequences when preparing for or responding to a crisis. For example, as part of the UK’s counter-

terrorism strategy, CONTEST (HMG 2023a), the Metropolitan Police Service mounted in 2008 an ‘If you suspect it, report it’ advertising campaign in London. Designed to encourage Londoners to report to an anti-terrorism hotline specific activities that could betray preparations for a terrorist attack, it generated false positives concentrated in particular communities who were left feeling persecuted rather than protected (e.g., cf Hansard 2008). The well-intended ‘Stay put’ advice which the London Fire Brigade gave some residents of Grenfell Tower in 2017 may, in the end, have prevented some from escaping the blaze (BBC 2022).

It might also be the case that the state intends to support community resilience but does not have the capacity to do so. Earthquake-prone Nepal offers a good example, in that it has excellent building regulations, but insufficient capacity to enforce them. As a consequence, the community-based non-governmental organisation, Nepal Society for Earthquake Technology, helps the country’s communities construct buildings that can better withstand tremors. This illustrates how one advantage of developing community resilience is demand-management for stretched public services.



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## THE STATUS QUO

The Civil Contingencies Act (*HMG 2004*) provides the main legislative framework for preparing for and responding to crises in the UK. Its implementation is supported by the Civil Contingencies Secretariat within the Cabinet Office. In 2021, the cross-sector, multi-agency UK Resilience Forum came into being. There are also National Resilience Standards (*HMG 2020*) which accompany the UK Government Resilience Framework (*HMG 2022*). This framework signals an optimistic direction of travel, stating: ‘The UK Government will also consider ways to enhance the role of citizens and the voluntary and community sector as an integrated part of resilience policy making and planning... A strengthened partnership with the voluntary and community sector will support them to maximise their contribution to resilience at local and national level. Recognising the importance of protecting communities from the impacts of emergencies and crises, the UK Government will strengthen standards for statutory responders in England to consider community resilience as an essential part of their work’ (*HMG 2022*).

The National Resilience Standards apply to Local Resilience Forums (LRFs), which are statutory partnerships between public bodies at the local level, responsible for producing, among other things, a local Community Risk Register (*HMG 2020*). National Resilience Standard 5 relates to Community Resilience. It concerns itself mostly with exhorting public bodies on LRFs to do more to inform and advise communities regarding matters of preparedness, but it also encourages active outreach and engagement. In addition, there is a Community Resilience Development Framework, which is ‘intended as a reference tool for the delivery of strategic approaches to community resilience development at the LRF level in collaboration with non-statutory partners’ (*HMG 2019*). Despite all this dedicated legal architecture and machinery of government, there remains no current obligation on the state at any level to engage meaningfully with communities themselves on the resilience agenda. An update to the Civil Contingencies Act, which is now almost 20 years old, could usefully address this gap (*Mann, Settle and Towler 2022*).

That said, some LRFs do use the discretion afforded them by subsidiarity to engage proactively with their local community, fusing top-down and bottom-up approaches to make the most of experts by experience as well as by education. This might take the form of:

- > Inviting the local voluntary sector umbrella bodies or faiths forums to attend an emergency planning working group or scenario-based exercises (*MPA 2007*).
- > Looking to the local community for assistance with risk assessment and monitoring, hazard mapping, reporting on the state of relevant infrastructure like storm drains, or early warning alerts.

- > Developing the Community Risk Register for the area together.
- > Training local workers such as receptionists or caretakers to function as additional eyes and ears in a crisis, specifying what sort of information blue-light services might need from them, using a simple tool like the M/ETHANE acronym (cf *JESIP 2023*), so they can support the situational awareness of first responders.
- > Developing active shooter protocols with, for instance, places of worship or schools and specialist police.
- > Running drills to simulate emergencies (being careful not to give any instructions that could be misunderstood).
- > Listening to the survivors of previous crises to hear what they would have found most useful during and after an emergency, including post-traumatic mental health support (*Stober 2022, Malcomson 2023, Bee The Difference 2023*).

These kinds of participatory, place-based approaches to co-producing resilience strengthen both society and state (*Pandey and Okazaki 2012; BRC 2023*). Neither an episodic task nor a timebound project, they must be an ongoing process (*Scully, Shaw and Powell 2023*). The Stronger LRFs pilot programme, funded after the government's commitment last year to strengthen the accountability and assurance of LRFs in England (*HMG 2022*), may see more localities adopting a co-productive approach.





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## PLAYING OUR PART IN PREPAREDNESS

The ‘prepper’ movement in the US has been shaped by a particular national history of revolution and civil war, together with the constitutional right to bear arms. People in the UK can, despite clear cultural differences, still adopt American preppers’ more helpful practices. Perhaps not everyone in the UK can or will fit solar panels to their roof to generate their own electricity or grow all their own food, but people here can take some rudimentary steps to increase their resilience and that of their household. For example:

- > Keep a grab-bag readily accessible in your home or car: a lightweight, durable bag containing, for example, a facemask, fire-resistant gloves, mobile phone, charger and battery-pack, whistle, torch with batteries, radio with batteries, fire-resistant blanket, Swiss army knife, first aid kit, enough non-perishable food and bottled water for three days, copies of key family documents in a waterproof bag, cash, credit card, prescription medicines, and keys.
- > Keep a cupboard in your home well-stocked with dried food which requires neither a fridge nor freezer.
- > Be sure you know where to turn off your home’s water, electricity and gas supplies.
- > Ensure you have appropriate insurance for your property and its contents, plus one or two photographs of each room to assist with any claims.
- > If you have more than one floor in your property, keep sentimental or valuable items upstairs (in case of floods).
- > Keep a hard-copy address book with key contact details in it, in case you cannot access or use electronic devices.
- > Be sure you know the emergency / evacuation procedures in your home, workplace and school.
- > Plan an alternative way to get home from work or school in case the normal routes or modes of transport are not available.
- > Agree a rendezvous point with family members in case an emergency occurs when you are not together and your home becomes inaccessible.
- > Teach your children how to say their full name and home address; how to say and dial their parents’ mobile phone numbers; and how and when to call 999.

The Swedish government in 2018 issued to every household in Sweden a paper copy of a booklet entitled ‘If Crisis Or War Comes’ which covers many of the items listed above (Persson 2021; SCCA 2022; Barnes 2023). It asks residents to consider what they would do if their ‘everyday life was turned upside down’ and proceeds to make various suggestions for

steps people can take to get their household ready for an emergency, including tips related to food and water supplies, warmth and communications. What is perhaps noteworthy about Sweden's approach is less the document's contents, but rather its format: by distributing it in hard copy to every household, the risk of the information proving inaccessible during an emergency is lowered. This contrasts with other countries' approaches. For the analogous Ready Scotland website to prove useful in an emergency, Scots would need to know it exists, know where to find it and have internet access at the time of need (*Scottish Government 2023*). Free US applications, such as the FEMA app offered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Notify NYC app developed by New York City Emergency Management, can be downloaded onto a smartphone or tablet, where they may then be easy to find, but that device still requires electrical power and the apps' offline features are limited (*FEMA 2023 and NYC 2023*).

Beyond our respective households, there are steps we can take in our communities to build resilience at the communal level too (*NCSR+ 2023*). That might mean agreeing that everybody on your street will check on their neighbours either side of their home in an emergency. Or perhaps it could mean establishing a community phone-tree and dividing up responsibility for who will call whom in a crisis – both to alert others to what is going on and to advise them how to seek help. Perhaps the most practical, threat-agnostic toolkit and step-by-step guide for how to bolster a community's preparedness in advance of an emergency is produced by Los Angeles County, RAND Corporation and Community Partners. It is entitled 'Resilience Builder – Tools For Strengthening Disaster Resilience In Your Community' (*LA County 2015*). Available online and as a PDF file, it can readily be saved onto a desktop or mobile device and shared with individuals and groups, for example via WhatsApp.



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## VOLUNTEERS AND DONATIONS

Two common ways that people's empathy and sense of community manifest are volunteering and making donations – whether in cash or in-kind. 'Technology cannot always be relied upon, but human compassion can' (*IPPR 2009*).

Some voluntary roles are pre-ordained. These might include trained positions such as fire marshals, first aiders, waking watch, stewards, childcare providers or translators. Others are more spontaneous (*Scully and Shaw 2022b*), such as the people who organised on social media and then headed to Croydon and elsewhere in London to help clean up the streets after riots in the summer of 2011. Even an *ad hoc* volunteer effort such as that can benefit from some structure – lent on that occasion by community organisers from the nascent Cares Family. A structured approach to providing support could helpfully comprise: scope, advertise, recruit, brief, equip, deploy, debrief, learn, and apply the lessons next time. It is important not to overburden volunteers, who can end up performing draining and sometimes traumatic tasks which can lead to burnout. Madrid's volunteering model offers a well-thought-through approach by a local authority to making the most of people's time, energy and skills. Its regional government offers a hub to promote, inform, advise and offer training on volunteering in the region, including material on principles, rights, duties, laws, contacts and opportunities for individual and corporate volunteers (*Community of Madrid 2023*). In Kyoto in Japan, it is members of the community themselves who help coordinate volunteers in a crisis. In the UK, organisations like the Community Security Trust self-organise effectively to bolster communal resilience.

Donations almost always require a degree of coordination to optimise their effect. There was a risk, for instance, amid the nationwide outpouring of solidarity in the wake of this year's Moroccan earthquake, that families sending donations in private cars into the worst affected communities in the High Atlas could inadvertently block narrow, landslide-strewn mountain routes upon which formal relief efforts relied. On other occasions, popular donations, such as knitwear, are not the things the people caught up in a crisis need. It is important then, when disaster strikes, that we prioritise positive impact over benign intention. This is why aid organisations often solicit cash donations rather than physical goods. Hence, when a national emergency unfolds, the National Emergencies Trust launches an appeal to raise funds to channel via other charities on the ground to survivors of the disaster and their loved ones.

State support to establish and maintain voluntary sector infrastructure in each local authority area can mean the most is made of offers of volunteers and donations when needed.

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## A RELATIONAL APPROACH

Critical to community resilience are relationships of mutual trust among and between community members in positions of civic leadership (such as members of the clergy or community centre managers) and elected and appointed leaders of local institutions of the state (such as the local council leader or police borough commander). These relationships take time to build consistently and cannot simply be created when disaster strikes. As the adage rightly goes: ‘the worst time to talk to someone for the first time is in a time of crisis.’

An extreme right-wing terrorist deliberately drove a van into a crowd of Muslim worshippers on their way home from tarawih prayers in Finsbury Park one midnight during Ramadan in the summer of 2017, murdering Makram Ali and injuring ten others. Longstanding relationships of mutual trust were the foundation of an effective community response. Because the local council’s elected leaders and senior managers, the local police and fire brigade leadership teams, the area’s two mosques’ management committees and other community leaders in the area already knew each other well, they were able to establish contact with each other quickly in the middle of the night. Everyone had each other’s personal mobile phone number and was willing to take their calls, despite the hour. This enabled them rapidly to convene and agree a plan to ensure community resilience in the face of this attack and provocation.

At the heart of this plan was a communication strategy that was drawn together by a group of those local leaders overnight at the nearby house of the local MP. That meant that, when the world’s media descended on Seven Sisters Road the next morning, the message their viewers and listeners heard was one of unity. The chair of Finsbury Park Mosque stood in front of a bank of cameras and journalists, with elected representatives lined up behind him, and delivered a single key message: a terrorist had sought to divide our community but had had the opposite effect, instead bringing us even closer together. This visible togetherness inspired confidence in the local community and echoed in coverage around the globe. It set the tone for everything that followed in what was a lengthy process of recovery, supported by multiple agencies, for the victim’s family, the injured survivors and the wider community.

Sadly, the strong relationships between the community and local authorities that served Finsbury Park well that night (see box) had not been so evident in a much bigger disaster a week earlier, when Grenfell Tower tragically went up in flames, killing 72 people. On that

occasion, the local authority did not have close ties with the people who lived in the block, nor the communities from which they came. This, by all accounts, significantly hindered the response to and recovery from the disaster, with new networks having to be forged from scratch – first as the tragedy unfolded, and then amid its grief-stricken fallout.

Systems, protocols and flowcharts all matter in an emergency, but responding to a crisis is fundamentally a human endeavour. A cornerstone of community resilience will always be the strength of relationships between civic and public leaders in the locality. This social scaffolding is every bit as important as any physical infrastructure when disaster strikes (*Corneil, Kuziemy, O’Sullivan and Toal-Sullivan 2013*).



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## COHESION AND EQUALITY

Given the central importance of relationships discussed above, it follows that cohesive, integrated, tight-knit communities are more likely to prove resilient in the face of shocks. They may also be better positioned to reduce any unequal impact of an emergency on different groups in their midst, thereby avoiding a crisis exacerbating existing inequalities in society. That is why, in public discourse during the Covid-19 pandemic, the metaphor was often invoked that we were ‘all in the same storm but sometimes in very different boats’.

So, what does cohesion and equality look like? In a country and a community committed to equality in a crisis, people with disabilities are not forgotten in evacuation plans; public information broadcasts are accessible to people with visual or hearing impairments, those without internet access or who do not speak English; emergency accommodation is not only available to those who can afford a hotel room; immigration status is not a consideration; rest centres afford some privacy; and so on. An inclusive approach to resilience must mean nobody is left behind, literally or figuratively.

We can look around the world for both good and bad practice. Following the recent earthquake in Morocco, relief and development charity Action Aid had staff on the ground in the mountains between Agadir and Marrakech making the case, for instance, for people to include sanitary products in the aid packages they were sending to the remote settlements that had been razed to the ground. The United Nations Development Programme has commissioned some evaluation of its work in Swaziland to increase levels of women’s participation there in local emergency planning (*UNDP 2010*). On the other hand, in the aftermath of the eruption in 2010 of volcano Mount Merapi in central Java, the Indonesian authorities set up separate camps for male and female displaced persons, thereby excluding the significant community of non-binary warias, as well as creating painful separation of family members.

According to their protected or other characteristics, some people in our community will likely be more vulnerable than others to particular types of crises. They may be older people, disabled people, children, migrants, students or others. Knowing who may be vulnerable on your street or neighbourhood could prove useful in an emergency to ensure that those who need it receive extra attention or support. It is nonetheless worth noting that capability and vulnerability are not necessarily on the same spectrum. People who exhibit certain vulnerabilities in one domain may be strong in others. During the Covid-19 pandemic, for example, some of those who were ‘shielding’ put their skills to work producing homemade facemasks, overseeing ring-arounds or leading virtual tours of cultural sites for others in their community. There is much to be said for this sort of strengths-based approach. However, it can have downsides. In the wake of the death and destruction wrought predominantly on the African-American population of New Orleans

by Hurricane Katrina in 2005, Louisiana Justice Initiative community organiser Tracie L Washington urged the authorities to: ‘Stop calling me resilient. Because every time you say “Oh, they’re resilient,” that means you can do something else to me. I am not resilient’ (Martin 2015). Her exhortation is a reminder of the risk of unconscious racial bias in our approach to resilience: ‘the thing about celebrating resilience is that it reinforces a reward system for suffering instead of dismantling the system that makes that resilience necessary’ (Simonpillai 2022).

One related area of community preparedness which demands particular attention is the potential for unusual interactions between community members to function as an enabler for exploitation. This can raise important questions of safeguarding which must not be avoided (Dunmore 2022). After the Moroccan earthquake this year, genuine fears of men coming from elsewhere in the country to prey on young Amazigh orphans for child marriage or forced labour were assuaged by the government designating all such orphans ‘wards of the nation’ – a label which affords them the state’s special protection – and transporting many of them to relative safety in Marrakech. In other crises, people can be taken in by fake fundraisers who look to steal trusting donors’ money. Sadly, difficult times, which for the most part showcase the best of humanity, can sometimes also attract its worst.



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## INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

The flow of information through communication in a crisis matters (*Scully and Shaw 2022a; NPC 2023*). Sometimes the choice of messenger is as important as the message. Researchers have found repeatedly that public trust in local government is significantly higher than in national government, so a ‘local first’ approach in some cases may make sense. Research also suggests that spokespeople in positions of authority, whoever they may be, need to find the right middle ground between communicating too little (and leaving a vacuum to be filled by rumour) and too much (inducing information overload and fatigue). They also need to strike the right balance between offering too much reassurance and not offering enough. Certainly, public communications in an emergency need to be empathetic, straightforward (without jargon) and honest (based on verified information and up-front about what authorities do not know), with clear calls to action. Done well, early communication in an emergency can frame the public narrative in ways that foster community resilience. Simple, memorable instructions can prevent an emergency in the first place, such as those issued by the British Transport Police in its generic ‘See it, Say it, Sorted’ campaign on the UK’s railways (*BTP 2023*). They can also be used to avoid decision inertia as a crisis unfolds, such as the ‘Run, Hide, Tell’ imperative for when an active shooter is on the loose (*ProtectUK 2023*). Meanwhile, different channels might be used for different audiences, including potentially local radio and diaspora media in other languages, to make sure key messages get to ‘hardly reached,’ minoritised groups, who are not ‘hard to reach’ if considered and concerted efforts are made.

There is often a real challenge posed by misinformation (inadvertently inaccurate information) or even disinformation (deliberately misleading information) circulating during a crisis. This risk increases as people’s primary sources of information shift from broadcast (such as terrestrial TV news and radio, which is subject to higher levels of scrutiny) to narrowcast (such as closed WhatsApp groups or social media’s polarising algorithms, which are much less accountable). This problem is made more difficult still by the psychological reality that well-meant attempts at myth-busting can backfire, compounding unhelpful frames of reference.

A positive example of open communications during a crisis is the weekly Zoom calls which Islington Council’s then Executive Member for Community Safety and Pandemic Response held with members of the public during the Covid-19 pandemic. At the time, this constituted a radical act of community-facing transparency. Any local resident, student, visitor or businessperson could join the calls. On them, Cllr Sue Lukes would provide an update on how the authorities understood the evolving situation and what was being done to address it. This might include, for example, advertising the opportunity to get vaccinated at The Arsenal Hub or publicising the local Mutual Aid groups organising for people to deliver groceries and prescriptions to neighbours in need. She would then open up the call for questions from participants. This harnessed prevalent technology to bring the community and the council closer together at a time when such togetherness counted for a lot.



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## THE ROLE OF BUSINESS

Whilst the majority of this paper relates to the voluntary and community sector, the public sector, and the relationships between the two, the private sector also has roles to play when it comes to community resilience. Small businesses can potentially deliver goods or services by bike or on foot to local residents when automotive transport is unavailable. Hotels can open their doors and rooms to displaced residents. Big businesses can make secondees or volunteers available to the community as part of their commitment to corporate social responsibility and collective resilience, as Sellafield Ltd did in Cumbria during Covid-19 (Scully and Shaw 2022c). They can also look to drive a preparedness requirement through their supply chain and help smaller businesses to develop and assess their business continuity plans. In case encouragement is needed, research has shown that 80 per cent of businesses caught without a workable business continuity plan are forced to close within a year of a major flood or fire (IPPR 2009). Telephony firms can make surge capacity available when everyone is trying to phone their loved ones at the same time in a major incident.

Assistance for the local community from businesses in an emergency is also more likely if relevant conversations have been had – and relationships built up – before a crisis hits. Vehicles to facilitate this networking may already exist in the form, for example, of a local Chamber of Commerce or Business Improvement District which could be invited to attend a working group of the LRF alongside groups representing the voluntary and community sector. In such a setting, local businesses could pledge support in advance, specifying the assets, skills and capabilities they could make available, when needed. Likewise, national businesses with local outlets, such as supermarket chains, should consider in advance what they will permit or encourage local branch managers to do to help the local community in a crisis.



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## CONCLUSION

Some aspects of national preparedness are reserved for the government itself to address, ideally as far upstream as possible. They are wide-ranging and include energy security, protecting critical national infrastructure, stockpiling vaccines, clearing space debris, or multilateral negotiations over nuclear non-proliferation. However, government cannot be expected to do everything. There are other facets of a whole-of-society approach to resilience that properly sit with individuals, households, businesses, charities and the communities of which they are part. A community that is prepared for crises is one that is ready to use networked adaptive capacities to limit an emergency's effects, minimise transient dysfunction and rapidly restore functionality after a disturbance (*Norris et al 2007*). To increase the chances of that, the following proposals are put forward for further discussion.

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## PROPOSALS FOR DISCUSSION

### Considerations for the UK Government (or devolved administrations, where appropriate)

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- Update the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 to introduce a new legal duty for LRFs to engage in a two-way relationship with the local community, voluntary sector and businesses on emergency planning and policymaking (building on the suggestions currently contained in National Resilience Standard 5).
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- As part of a wider ongoing national conversation about preparedness, the government should regularly distribute a paper copy of a threat-agnostic preparedness leaflet to every household in the UK. It should contain straightforward advice for how to prepare for a crisis, plus an explanation of the government's emergency alerts to nearby threats to life. The government should ensure these leaflets actually reach all of the intended recipients (as complete coverage has not been achieved in previous efforts, e.g., the swine flu leaflet disseminated in 2009).
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- Ringfence funding for local authority emergency planning functions to ensure all councils resource them adequately.
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- Make funding available nationwide to support voluntary and community sector capacity building and infrastructure development to bolster community resilience.
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- Liaise closely with local authorities to achieve consistent, unambiguous and actionable messaging from the state for the public in an emergency.
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- Work with regulators and industry to ensure adequate and affordable insurance against flood damage is available to every household. Pay attention too to market trends to ensure the continued availability of insurance against other hazards.
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- Negotiate with insurers to incentivise small-to-medium sized businesses to develop Business Continuity Plans.
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## Considerations for Local Authorities

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- Require their senior leaders (both officers and members) in periods of relative normality to invest time and effort in building relationships of mutual trust and confidence with the leaders of local emergency services and community groups, which will serve the area well when a major incident occurs.

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- Foster cohesive local communities by using their role as a shaper of place to create and maintain spaces and events where members of the public from different backgrounds come together and interact.

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- Apply for grants from national funds (see Proposal 4 above) to support the local voluntary and community sector to engage with the council and partners on questions of community resilience, investing in the interface between bureaucratic state structures and charities on the ground.

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- Ensure safeguarding arrangements are in place as part of any emergency response.

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## Considerations for LRFs

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- Build multi-way relationships with the local community, voluntary sector and businesses, for example by involving them in developing the Community Risk Register, emergency planning, scenario-based exercises, practice drills, risk assessment and monitoring, hazard mapping, early warning and post-crisis debriefs.

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- Engage marginalised groups in the local community to identify specific concerns (e.g., regarding vaccine safety) or vulnerabilities (e.g., social isolation) among subsets of the local population in order collectively to address them in emergency planning.

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- Offer training in resilience-relevant skills such as first aid, fire safety or situational awareness to local workers such as receptionists, caretakers, venue stewards or traffic wardens.

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- Promote weather alert services and property defence measures in flood-prone areas.

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- Be prepared to move critical systems from in-person to online (or vice-versa) in an emergency.
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- Ensure the availability, visibility and flexibility of family assistance, specialist counselling and trauma-informed mental health support for disaster survivors.
- 
- In conjunction with the local voluntary and community sector, put in place arrangements to coordinate both volunteers (planned and spontaneous) and donations (cash and in-kind) in an unfolding crisis.
- 
- Prepare and maintain a readily accessible, up-to-date communications strategy for use in an emergency, identifying in advance a selection of local spokespeople and a range of different channels (including both social and minority media).
- 
- Connect local communities with relevant national (e.g., the Community Heartbeat Trust) and local (e.g., Eye On Calderdale) resources to enhance particular dimensions of preparedness where related to specific hazards in their Community Risk Register.
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## Considerations for large businesses

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- Update their Business Continuity Plan annually, as one element of a wider resilience strategy which also encompasses, for example, the interrogation of internal processes, stakeholder management and staff support.
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- Require as a condition that their suppliers and contractors also have an up-to-date Business Continuity Plan.
- 
- Build an element of redundancy into their operation for when disasters strike.
- 
- In areas where they operate, help small-to-medium sized businesses develop their own Business Continuity Plan.
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- Consider empowering local store or franchise managers to make the company's human and other resources available to the community in a time of crisis.
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## Considerations for small-to-medium sized businesses

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- Seek to establish what their local community might need from them in a crisis.
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- In light of this, consider what capacities and capabilities they could add to the local response in an emergency, sharing their conclusions with the LRF.
- 
- Develop a Business Continuity Plan to ensure their survival through and beyond an emergency.
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## Considerations for community groups (e.g., residents' associations, local charities, faith groups)

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- Adopt a methodical approach to bolstering community resilience in their area, for instance by following the clear steps laid out in 'Resilience Builder' (LA County 2015).
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- Engage proactively with the LRF to contribute to their area's emergency anticipation, preparation and response.
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## Considerations for households and the individuals within them

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- Familiarise themselves with the emergency and evacuation procedures in their home, workplaces and schools.
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- Formulate a family emergency plan, including, for example, alternative ways to get home from work or school in case the normal routes or modes of transport are not available; an agreed rendezvous point in case their home becomes inaccessible; and how to establish contact with one another if telephone or internet services are down.
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- Ensure every adult and child in the household (who is capable of knowing) knows: where to turn off the property’s water, electricity and gas supplies; their full name and home address; the full name and telephone number of one or two emergency contacts or next of kin; and how and when to call 999 for the police, fire brigade or ambulance service.
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- Make sure they have: building and household contents insurance; a paper address book containing key contact details; a cupboard well stocked with dried food; and a grab-bag (cf p7) full of essentials in case they have to leave in a hurry.
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- Research and subscribe to sources of official advice and alerts, such as travel guidance, threat levels or extreme weather forecasts.
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