

Witness Name: Jeannie Barr

Statement No.:1

Exhibits: 15

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## UK COVID-19 INQUIRY

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### WITNESS STATEMENT OF Emergency Planning Society

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I, Jeannie Barr , will say as follows: -

#### 1. Background

The Emergency Planning Society (EPS) was created in 1993, to promote effective emergency planning and management.

We achieve this by:

- Establishing the professional standards necessary to work effectively and ethically within emergency management and resilience.
- Provision of a Competence Framework of Professional Practice for Resilience.
- Professional Code of Conduct to guide professional behavior and ethics.
- Continued Professional Development Scheme (CPD). Supporting our members 'professional development through provision of opportunities for learning and recording thus encouraging learning and development to become conscious and proactive.
- Development of the opportunities and means to share knowledge, skills, expertise, and experiences across the profession.
- Publishing a professional magazine and journal.
- Provision of learning and networking opportunities including webinars, seminars, conferences, workshops and training.
- Provision of networks through communities of interest, branches and working groups.
- Influencing policy and change by maintaining close relationships with key policy makers and researchers.

## 1.1 Civil Contingencies Act 2004

The introduction of legislation and the implementation of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 was groundbreaking and provided the statutory duties and regulations for the delivery of emergency management within the UK.

Our Core Competences Project was initiated in May 2006 as a joint venture between the Civil Contingencies Secretariat (CCS) and the EPS. The purpose was to develop a framework of competences that would lead to an enhanced professionalism within Emergency Management and so raise levels of service delivery that would support the Civil Contingencies Act (2004) and strengthen the resilience of the United Kingdom (UK) and Ireland. One year into the project it was announced that the Sector Skills Council for Justice would be leading a project to develop National Occupational Standards (NOS) in Civil Contingencies. Consequently, it was agreed that Skills for Justice would work in partnership with the project and as a result the NOS for Civil Contingencies formed the foundation of the Core Competencies Framework.

### 1.1.1 The EPS Core Competence Framework was published June 2011 [JB/01-INQ000102835]

## 1.2 Development of Framework of Practice

The convergence of emergency management with a broader resilience framework, has created opportunities for further development of governance, competences, and professional standards.

In 2019 we commissioned a review of our Competence Framework *Pollock K Coles E (2019) BUILDING A RESILIENCE PROFESSION Presenting a Framework of Resilience Practice for the UK.*

Our work on the development of a Professional Framework of Practice and Learning Pathway, supported by our Code of Professional Conduct, builds on the foundations of our competency framework and unequivocally provides a fit for purpose framework for all sectors and level of membership.

[JB/02- INQ000102825]

### **1.2.1 Preparedness**

The Emergency Planning Society is not a responding organisation but an organisation that sets the professional standards for those working as part of the UK resilience infrastructure and through provision of learning and development opportunities and other initiative we support UK preparedness, response and recovery.

- Our learning and development programme is developed to provide members with the necessary resources to improve their skills.
- Content and topics are based on current key risks and lessons from previous incidents.
- We provide guidance and opportunities to share good practice.

Below, I provide an overview of critical elements of our learning and sharing activities which supports our members in preparation, response and recovery and whole systems approach within the UK.

### **1.3 Reviews & Events**

Our learning and development programme is developed to provide members with the necessary resources to improve their skills.

#### **EPS Annual Conference September 2006**

Pandemic Influenza Fact or Fiction

**[JB/03 INQ000102826]**

#### **September 2013**

EPS Emergency Planning Initiative of the Year

The EPS have held Annual Awards Ceremonies. These awards recognised teams, companies, organisations for good practise or innovation in resilience and emergency planning.

**Summer 2014:** Wales EPS seminar, part funded by Welsh Government, on review of National Infrastructure – resilience and impacts on the community.

**Autumn 2014:** explanation of why flu pandemic is the highest risk on the Risk Register, and how that transfers to risk perception by the public (*A risky perception*, Mike Pennifold, Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council).

**June 2016:** the EPS was among seven organisations selected to make presentations to the House of Commons Select Committee for Science & Technology, for its examination of Science in emergencies: CBRN incidents.

**November 2016** former Chair of the society received a letter noting concerns with regard to Reduced UK Essential Medicines Buffer Stockpiles.

**[JB/04 INQ000102827]**

**April 2017** the then EPS Chair sent a letter to the Department of Health outlining these concerns.

**[JB/05 INQ000102828]**

**Winter 2017-18:** examination of how the former Central Office of Information warned and informed both media and public about swine flu and lessons for today (*Getting the message across on Swine Flu*, Bob Wade, Editor)

**September 2017:** in partnership with the HSE, the EPS COMAH & Pipeline PWG surveyed local authorities with COMAH responsibilities on progress towards Seveso III, to help inform the HSE on its review of COMAH guidance.

**Autumn 2017:** the EPS was asked to contribute to the establishment of the Grenfell Public Inquiry chaired by Sir Martin Moore-Bick, on what should be included in the inquiry's Terms of Reference. A detailed submission was provided, most of which was incorporated.

**July 2021 Community and City Resilience and COVID-19 - A Webinar Series**

The series was centred around Community & City Resilience and Covid19 and the themes of recovery including people - the physical impacts, psychological, community displacement, community cohesion, deaths'; economic, infrastructure, disruption to daily life, education, welfare services, transport, utilities / essential

services and environmental including pollution and decontamination, waste, natural resources, opportunities, environmental impact, changes to behaviours, impacts and consequences.

## **2. General Reflections**

We contribute articles to magazines on a regular basis ie Crisis Response Journal, Emergency Services Times and Resilience.

**2.1 Autumn 2019: Former EPS Chair Jacqui Semple** wrote: "...As practitioners, our roles are vast and varied and without exception, has created significantly more work for all of us... we anticipate, assess, plan and prepare for all eventualities; it is what we do. It has tested our capacity to the limit - are we at the limit? Are our resources stretched to the point of no more give? Limited investment across all sectors is creating unprecedented risks; reduction in budgets is unparalleled" (Extract *Editorial 'memo' Resilience*).

**2.1.1 Winter 2019-20:** report on findings of US National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease, warning that Covid was spreading like influenza, rather than like its 'viral cousins', SARS and MERS (Extract *Coronavirus set to go pandemic*, news report Resilience).

**2.1.2 Summer 2020:** More than 100 resilience professionals joined an educational event held by the EPS, which explored moving forward from the COVID-19 crisis. The webinar, *Living with Afterwards*, was hosted by EPS Fellow Professor Lucy Easthope and EPS Chair Jacqui Semple and brought together a panel of experts from emergency planning, disaster management, public health, CBRN and academia. With a focus on supporting strategic decision makers within local authorities, including Chief Executives, the panel offered expert guidance, insights, discussion and advice on the current COVID19 situation, how we can all move forward and how resilience professionals can continue delivering their essential roles to the highest standard in the midst of the emergency. (Extract Resilience)

**2.1.3 Summer 2020:** The feature in this issue by Julian Patmore, former associate trainer at the Emergency Planning college and later East Sussex County Council, has some good general reflections:

“ In spite of its profile on the National Risk Register and a lot of activity in 2005 and beyond, the fact that 2009 impacts were much less severe than planned for, combined with the low frequency of pandemics in general, has perhaps seen a reduction in pandemic planning in some areas in recent times, particularly in the context of austerity management within the public sector.

“ Conversely, pandemic's topicality caused its use as a training scenario to be bled dry and overly focused on the operational aspect, creating a knowledge and skills gap in senior leaders. The uncertainties of epidemiological novelty, the response of the public to social controls and government's ability to balance public safety and economic stability have presented challenges hard to conceptualise and plan for except in the abstract, or as de minimis statements of acknowledgement in plans for which data is not available until the event is in progress “ (Extract Resilience - *Planning for pandemics*, Julian Patmore)

**2.1.4 Britain is in a state of emergency. So where are its emergency planners?**

5<sup>th</sup> May 2020 Professor David Alexander

“My task is to tell you things you don't want to know, and ask you to spend money you haven't got on something you don't think will happen.”

Fast-forward more than a decade, and it seems the UK government was badly prepared for the coronavirus pandemic. It's not as if we didn't have prior warning that an event like this was a threat. Though Exercise Cygnus of 2016 remains shrouded in mystery, the government's national risk register of civil emergencies has long put pandemics at the top of the list of risks the UK faces. And by 2016, planners in the UK were fully engaged in confronting the supply-chain disaster that would be Brexit, struggling to figure out how, for example, to boost the UK's coffee supply. Britain is experienced in planning for pandemics – so where is the emergency management of coronavirus? What we know so far about committees such as the scientific advisory group for emergencies (Sage) is that they appear to include no independent advisers on emergency planning and management.

(Excerpt from article in Guardian Newspaper)

**[JB/06 INQ000103586]**

**2.1.4 | Excerpt from Reply from Jacqui Semple Former EPS Chair to the article by David Alexander.** (Excerpt publication and website)

THE UK's leading representative body for resilience professionals has today called on the country's leaders to fully use the expertise of "emergency planners" in their response to the ongoing COVID-19 crisis - and beyond.

The EPS is the UK's leading professional body for all those involved in any form of resilience, emergency planning and crisis and disaster management and represents members from local government, emergency services, academia, commercial organisations, the voluntary sector and others.

The organisation has called on the Governments of all UK nations to fully utilise the expertise and experience of its emergency planning professionals to help further develop its ongoing response to COVID-19.

To date, the Society says, emergency planners have not been involved by Government at the very highest levels of planning in the way colleagues in medicine or epidemiology have been. So far, it would seem committees such as the scientific advisory group for emergencies (SAGE) do not appear to include any independent advisers on emergency planning and management.

**[JB/07 INQ000102829]**

**2.1.5 Excerpt Crisis Response Journal Call for Evidence Overview Aug 2021 Jacqui Semple**

The country's resilience in a number of different areas has been challenged repeatedly throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, but this crisis is not the first extreme challenge we have faced as a country, nor will it be the last. As the Government launches its call for evidence to contribute to the formation of a national resilience strategy, Emergency Planning Society Chair Jacqui Semple explores the most important aspects it will consider – and how resilience professionals can make sure their voice is heard in its information.

**[JB/08 INQ000102824]**

#### **2.1.6 Excerpt Crisis Journal Using the Right Words Jeannie Barr**

EPS webinars have discussed how the use of vocabulary and terminology has been concerning at times, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic. Use of the word 'vulnerable' was raised as a potential barrier to those who needed help. Simply put, many of the people who could be considered 'vulnerable' in terms of being at risk of contracting Covid-19 simply did not associate themselves with the word and therefore did not seek assistance.

**[JB/09 INQ000102836]**

#### **2.1.7 Excerpt Crisis Response Journal The Voices of Resilience**

EPS members penned an extensive response calling on the government to: "Utilise our expertise to co-develop frameworks and benchmarking tools which reflect reality and which are fit for purpose." They highlighted the failure to learn from past incidents and called for: "A consistent, legislated, national approach," to learning lessons. And much, much more.

**[JB/10 INQ000102830]**

#### **2.1.8 Excerpts from article printed in Crisis Response Journal Learning Lessons to Shape Future Responses , Jeannie Barr Interim Chair Emergency Planning Society.**

Learning from major incidents should be embedded into everything we do so that it is transformed into day-to-day practice and becomes part of our muscle memory of preparing to respond to recover. Once this learning is identified, how is it shared and what do we do to ensure it is understood, accepted and embedded?

What becomes of the 'lost' learning and why we struggle to transform lessons identified into learning. It examined three key words – acceptance, change and transformation – exploring how crises could be a chance to improve and develop.

The EPS calls on the government to utilise the expertise of its membership to co-develop frameworks and benchmarking tools to reflect the reality that organisations find themselves in and that are fit for purpose.



It also highlighted the well documented failure to learn from past incidents and raised concerns that the section of the proposed strategy covering prevention, mitigation and recovery does not make explicit reference to learning. The EPS suggests that this is an

oversight and that having a consistent, legislated and national approach would be a significant development in bringing about the culture change required to make learning lessons more commonplace.

Lessons from Covid will be significant in everything we do going forward.

**[JB/11 INQ000102831]**

## **2.2. Events**

We provide opportunities for members to build their own personal resilience.

During Covid we provided a safe space for members to engage, support and learn from each other and from specialists. Alongside this we provided access to peer support, mentoring and buddying. And provided learning opportunities to enhance skills and learn lessons.

**2.2.1 Spring 2020:** first 'Resilience Chat' on Zoom, held on 25 March and attended by 65 practitioners. It "... provided a confidential and professional space, to discuss freely how the emergency is impacting across the resilience profession, and our role and importance at this critical time.

"This will be the first in a series of 'Resilience Chats' hosted by the EPS for our members, as the COVID-19 crisis winds on " (EPS chair Jacqui Semple, *Editorial 'memo'*)

**2.2.2 September 2020** EPS Annual Conference New Perspectives to our Wicked Problems? Leadership. Trust. Unity. Competence'

Notes from presentation from former EPS Chair Jacqui Semple

Over the past few months, it has become evident that the continued response to COVID-19 is raising many issues, which are being echoed across the UK, yet "our" voice is not being heard?

**[JB/12 INQ000102832]**

### **2.2.3 Webinars**

More than 100 resilience professionals joined the webinar, **Living with Afterwards** which explored moving forward from the COVID-19 crisis.

The webinar brought together a panel of experts from emergency planning, disaster management, public health, CBRN and academia.

With a focus on supporting strategic decision makers within local authorities, including Chief Executives, the panel offered expert guidance, insights, discussion and advice on the current COVID-19 situation, how we can all move forward and how resilience professionals can continue delivering their essential roles to the highest standard in the midst of the emergency.

### **2.2.4 Community & City Resilience & COVID-19**

The webinars were well received both by members and non-members with over 460 individuals from all sectors, registering.

The series was designed to embrace the different aspects of recovery:

- People – Physical impacts, psychological, community displacement, community, cohesion, deaths and wellbeing.
- Economic – Economic impacts, challenges and future planning.
- Infrastructure - Disruption to daily life, education, welfare services, transport, utilities /essential services and lockdown, specifically compliance.
- Environmental - Pollution decontamination, waste, natural resources, opportunities, environmental impact, changes to behaviours, impacts and

## **2.3 Call for Evidence**

The Society provided submissions and input into the development of the UK Government Resilience Framework. We provided opportunities to hear from our members on their key concerns and priorities ahead of providing these submissions.

### **2.3.1 Extracts from Emergency Planning Society Submission to the House of Lords Select Committee 11 February 2021**

The pandemic has outlined several key areas of vulnerability. Much of it already evident in our overloaded systems, yet, they have been largely underfunded, and expected to perform miracles, and step up to government directives with little or no regard to delivery or relevance at local level. National initiatives implemented without due regard to the 'how, why, where or when' or long-term need and sustainability.

The resilience/emergency management profession is extremely vulnerable. Lack of investment, resource, and funding. There must be a root and branch review, investment, and recognition at the highest level of the expertise and specialists that make it all happen; they continue to rise to the challenges. It is not sustainable in the longer term.

Supply chains are vulnerable and more so with the EU exit implications. Interdependencies and reliance on the same supply chains has been evident through the pandemic, with many using procurement routes which put all the "eggs in one basket"

Everything we do has the potential to have disruptors. We cannot continue to identify vulnerabilities without investing and preparing adequately. The pandemic has highlighted extreme flaws in our systems, i.e. responder agencies have heard government announcements at the same time as members of the public, often late in the evening with an expectation of delivery the following day. This shows a complete lack of knowledge and understanding of dealing with emergencies and the importance of situational awareness and communication. Existing structures have been largely ignored.

**[JB13/INQ000102833]**

### **2.3.2 Extracts from the Response to National Resilience Strategy – Call For Evidence from The Emergency Planning Society.**

We have seen countless examples over the response to COVID where plans that had been made were not utilised and legislation that was available for the introduction of emergency powers was not used.

Our members have consistently highlighted the uphill struggle in bringing unplanned responses back to more planned and tested arrangements.

We recognise the need for a degree of flexibility in planning for emergencies. However, our members would urge the Government to work with the profession to adapt of existing capacities, rather than improvising a response. This is a more legally defensible for professionals and by extension, their organisations.

We would suggest that, in addition to having the legislation and supporting guidance, the Government recognise and endorses the Emergency Planning Society's 'Approved Code of Professional Conduct (EPS 2020) applicable to anyone working in this field.

Members of the Emergency Planning Society have expressed their frustration during the COVID response that a political message of 'being the best' carries an implication that it comes at another nation's detriment. The EPS recommends taking a collaborative rather than a competitive approach and that the UK should be seeking to listen and share best practices. This is embodied in the comments in the paper about 'building a more resilient UK *together*'.

The experience of COVID and Brexit has generated considerable reflection within our membership. We believe that these events will be fundamental in how we think about emergency management in the future and that they will in time bring change. However, much of that change will be determined by people working locally to resolve issues rather than through systemic policy-driven changes.

We can likely learn a lot about public behaviour from COVID however this will take time to be properly analysed and interpreted, and we cannot be sure at this stage how long-lasting the changes will be. The emerging narrative of 'return to

normal' also implies a return to pre-COVID conditions and therefore dismissal of learning.

As we would have anticipated, prolonged incident response is challenging in a variety of ways. However, one of the most acute challenges is the impact of staff capacity and resources.

Overall, we expect to see a greater emphasis on risk management as a whole. Some of this will translate to emergency planning investment, however much of it will be an investment in the recovery of those areas of business that have endured the greatest impacts.

The LRF Pilot funding appeared to be random, unmanaged and unclear. We sincerely hope that the government has recognised the benefit and contribution of emergency management and public health at the local level. There are highly experienced and capable professionals who have suffered a degradation of the level of resourcing for some time, and now is the time to ensure the appropriate funding is available.

**[JB14/INQ000102834]**

### **2.3.3 Extracts NTU C19 NFG Report 261020 Third Interim Operational Report**

"The tendency for significant guidance from government to come out late in a Friday evening or at the very last minute or in deed sometimes after the event/deadline has placed significant strain in the operational aspects of pandemic response, management and recovery."

"The relationship with government depts and MHCLG does feel mainly reactive - we flag a problem with them, they respond. It doesn't feel we often get given a heads-up about something in advance. And we still experience the problem of the government making an announcement but with no guidance to support it, leaving the LRF/LAs/partners unclear how to plan or implement the subject of the announcement. The recent announcement about marshals is an example of this, as was previous announcements about the high street fund and emergency active travel fund - LAs are constantly on the backfoot trying to respond and seek clarity."



The premise of subsidiarity is fundamental to how the resilience and civil contingencies structures are organised and function. This premise (according to the Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles doctrine) is that decisions are taken at the lowest appropriate level (local), with coordination at the highest level (national). Delegates suggest that this principle has become confused or misaligned in the context of Covid- 19.

As seen in Content of the Communication Strategy (Finding One), the delegates felt there was no overall strategy to align activity. This meant decision-making at the local level struggled to align across local (horizontal) or national (vertical) strategies and actions. This limits the coordination of decisions between the local areas across the nation, aggregating them and theming them for central support and coordination across the country. To move towards fixing this, a national strategy needs to be provided which the local decision-makers could then use as a framework of assumptions to make decisions against which are developed in collaboration with their communities. Not only does the national strategy need to be clarified regarding Covid-19 response and recovery, but the strategy of delivery needs to be re-affirmed regarding the central premise of the emergency management structures, namely subsidiarity. This would prevent further erosion of this principle as a central method of managing the pandemic.

Local decision-makers feel that they are not being consulted or notified on a wide range of issues. The central premise of subsidiarity has been distorted as the management and flow between the structures have become confused. Delegates called for this be reinstated and delivered to support them to do their jobs, tailoring national strategy and frameworks to their specific local contexts. To clarify, delegates discussions indicate that decisions are being taken at the highest level (national), with coordination at the highest level (national), and then those decisions and coordination are being reworked at the lowest level (local) when the national solution does not provide a workable solution within their local context. This creates additional work and means that the coordination is challenging for the local structures (such as LRFs) as they do not have a legal status.

The development of other structures such as the JBC, IMT and nationally controlled initiatives has complicated this further, and created more confusion and uncertainty. Local decision-makers have seen challenges (and have also felt supported by) these new structures. Some are not clear on their role, and many delegates called for the need to refine and clarify escalation processes, docking levels and processes, as well as where and who makes decisions about what. Ensuring that activation/ escalation triggers are aligned across local structures and then calibrated with sub-national structures such as JBC and IMTs and the national strategy would significantly help the communications, approach and planning at local level. Delegates described that frequently they were not able to do the right thing by local communities which forced the local strategic decision-makers to wait for a decision from central, national decision-makers because the standard subsidiarity model was not being followed.

Accountability at local level has been disrupted due to the impacts from the national decision-making about local areas. This is novel within the context of the civil contingencies' frameworks due to the premise of subsidiarity. Delegates suggested that local organisations have responsibility, but this is overridden by national decisions which sometimes have no insight as to how government plans may affect local factors and plans and the effectiveness of them.

Delegates report that they did not feel understood or trusted by Central Government and Ministers. Delegates have reported that Ministers and some government departments still do not understand what LRFs and SCGs are, what these structures can and cannot do, and what the difference is between an LRF and an SCG. This hampers the ability to integrate the national and local approach, as the expectations from the national decision-makers are misplaced or misaligned with the civil contingencies' frameworks, or guidance materials are incorrectly framed, or include incorrect details.

The lack of trust in the local structures from Ministers and government departments and representatives also impacts on their ability to feel included as part of a greater UK wide management of the pandemic. This is because the local decision-makers cannot commit to a local leadership perspective or philosophy of approach, as they feel the national will not see or recognise that approach, or that developing a local approach and associated communications

will be pointless due to the announcement-led communication strategy at national level. This undermines any building of integrity and trust in the local decision-makers as they are the public face of the government approach at local level and acts to deflate any momentum of local actions.

**[JB15/INQ0002837]**

## **2.5 Summary – Empirical Evidence**

Governments need to recognise and champion resilience thinking within the operating model so that together the profession and those elected to lead, enhance the resilience of the nation against the wide and varied threats and risks that impact society and our infrastructure.

Feedback from our members during the response to Covid along with information contained within newspaper articles, reviews, reports etc would suggest that the Government Response to covid was knee jerk and reactive and that the established resilience response structures and plans were not utilised appropriately. Whether this was because there was a lack of knowledge of the existence of these structures, this was a new problem, or it wasn't considered as an 'emergency' (definition CCA Act 2004) and therefore requiring a different approach, resilience and emergency professionals were not part of any advisory group for government.

The United Kingdom benefits from extremely experienced and competent resilience professionals working at all levels of the resilience & response community to develop robust resilience plans and to ensure these plans are tested validated and implemented effectively. These structures and plans need to be recognised as the delivery mechanism for Government Strategy and fully integrated into Government National Infrastructure for resilience with clear purpose direction and shared vision.

The professional members of the Emergency Planning Society through our day-to-day work, through training & exercises, and through post incident learning, identify areas of improvements to enhance our planning and response to incidents. Central Government needs to ensure that its structures, allocation of resources and policies meaningfully support the profession, so that learning at all



levels are shared, embedded and enable us to look after people during times of crisis.

### **3. Members Supporting Statement**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

Following submission of the Rule 9 request to the Emergency Planning Society (EPS) on 02/02/23 the Covid Inquiry advised that additional information could be provided to support this submission.

Over the course of several weeks the Emergency Planning Society approached its members to provide their comments on a series of questions on the UK preparedness between 2009 and Jan 2020. All participants confirmed that they were members for all or part of the period between 2009 and Jan 2020.

Questions asked are noted below:

1. Did you attend any EPS events between 2009 and Jan 2020 in relation to UK's planning, preparedness and resilience for whole system emergencies or pandemics?
2. If asked in 2019, how prepared would you have said the UK was for a pandemic?
3. As a member of the EPS, please share your general reflections in respect of the UK's readiness for the Covid-19 pandemic. I have provided a summary of those comments below and included direct quotes from members to illustrate some points.

#### **3.2 Events**

Attendance at various EPS events between 2009 and January 2020 was noted by many contributing members. In particular, members recalled a session on sharing lessons from Swine Flu and the annual EPS conferences which routinely covered aspects related to whole system emergencies as key opportunities to share information and learning from incidents.

Members noted that much of the learning from the Swine Flu experience had not been systematically captured nationally and therefore the learning opportunity had been lost.

Members also recalled participation at non-EPS events and exercises including Exercise Cygnus.

### **3.2.2 UK Preparation in 2019**

Members thoughts on UK preparedness varied according to their role and the role of their organisation. Broadly, those members within national / central government organisations were more positive about the level of preparedness than those working at the local level.

#### **3.2.2b. Additional information to support the responses.**

From the comments there were a number of key themes, which I have summarised below.

##### **i Exercises**

Those members working at national level, felt that significant effort was put into national exercising, with varying levels of resource made available across the country.

However, members from local organisations felt that although there had been National exercises (Exercise Cygnus, Exercise Winter Willow) they noted a struggle to get access to debrief reports, or recommendation, actions, and outcomes. Some noted that Local Resilience Forums or more locally focused responders were not invited to national exercises.

Those aware of the recommendations from exercise Cygnus recalled that gaps were identified, but noted that very little was undertaken to address these gaps. It was observed that during COVID-19 several of the gaps identified during these exercises manifested.

Members noted that lessons were often identified multiple times, but there was limited evidence to suggest that learning was integrated into necessary changes to planning or practice. Members also mentioned that there

appeared to be a reluctance to admit that lessons had not been learnt from previous incident.

## **ii National Considerations**

Participants noted that austerity, lack of resource, and the daily workload of emergency responder organisations were all potential contributing factors underlying a lack of sharing of resources (human and physical) and information. Organisational changes and restructuring was identified as a factor in changing resource, loss of relationships and knowledge, and causing gaps in partnerships. The Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG), National Health Service (NHS) and Public Health England (PHE), were given as examples.

*'Primary Healthcare Trusts to Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCG's), CCGs then changed multiple times. We didn't have a stable period, NHS England changed their names and institutional memory goes when staff leave, and organisations change as well'.*

Members felt that national planning and preparedness was largely done well. However, modelling of risks at the national level was not considered to be especially effective for local planning. There was a feeling that national planning and preparedness, was dominated by a health and fatalities focus, rather than logistical and societal consequences.

*'Local preparedness (depending on Local Resilience Forums) meant we had a wider society issue preparedness but reliant on Government guidelines. Blockage for Government for decisions. We understood that Government would take lead in certain parts.'*

National participants felt there would have been adequate stockpiles in 2019. However, there was consensus from local participants that over the past years they had witnessed dwindling resources in stockpiling. One participant remembered being given advice against local stockpiling as this was being taken care of nationally.

It was recognised that honest regular communication between local and national level was not always apparent.

Members noted that whilst Ebola is a different infection and there had been minimal patients in comparison it also offered an opportunity to gain an understanding of the epidemiology of disease that spreads across the globe.

### **iii Information**

Some participants expressed a concern about secrecy issues as barriers to being informed. This included challenges around the risk assessment procedures and use of Resilience Direct to share information.

One participant noted that *'in the past there were national conferences to share the learning'* from incidents like Buncfield, but significantly fewer of these over recent years. One participant specifically noted that there appeared a reluctance to share and hard to find learning from Storm Arwen. It was suggested that the Joint Organisational Learning (JOL) initiative had only had limited success.

### **iv Risk**

Resource allocation to new risk management methodologies caused resource drain into an area where there was limited capacity at local level. It was felt that the risk management system was too focused on methodology and prioritisation for national resource, rather than building local capability.

*'We never moved to the capability, as we spent hours, days, months in haggling over risks and scores'.*

Participants noted a great deal of focus on risk assessment but less focus on risk management.

Participating members aired concerns that Brexit and Cyber preparedness had diverted resource and priorities at both national and local levels for extremely long periods. However, it was noted that this had been an opportunity for multiagency working and building relationships with organisations outside of the CCA definitions, including foodbanks and supermarkets.

## **v Plans**

National plans did not refer to lockdown and stated schools will never close, therefore had not been planned for locally

*'If allowed we would have thought about these issues, rather than attention being diverted'. 'Swine flu we saw the same, alert levels thrown out on the first day, the national framework being abandoned so plans [became] ineffective'.*

A broad consensus that pandemic planning had been the domain of health professionals rather than being recognised as a societal risk. One participant alluded to Health's pandemic 'calculator' for bed occupancy and deaths, identifying gaps but no solutions in their area.

## **vi Local Resilience Forum**

There was a suggestion that channelling information through LRF Chairs caused delay and barrier to effective communication. One participant noted that *'hearing it first-hand is so powerful'*.

Discussion on lack of investment at the local level was significant.

*'Resilience is a trade of efficiency, with a 'not in our term of office' attitude to investment decisions'*

*'Austerity paid a part; resilience was degraded due to cuts. [Swine flu] wasn't that bad last time so it won't be this time and we can get away with doing less' Making decisions to save money especially at local government is a traded off against resilience'.*

The impact on levels of wellbeing and stress on emergency planners at every level considering budget pressures, increasing workloads and public and political expectations was a highly emotive issue.

## **vii EPS Role**

All members agreed that the Emergency Planning Society has a role in supporting information sharing and support to practitioners. It was identified that the EPS has an important role in cross pollination of perspectives, sharing outside of typical domains and providing a challenge function.

*'EPS plays a role in institutional memory we are one of the national institutions who keep the sector memory alive'.*

Professionalisation of the field, through the Society, was felt important to ensure a voice into government. It was felt that expertise was not being sought or listened to at national level. It was noted that academia also has a role in supporting resilience development and professionalisation.

### **2.3 Members general reflections in respect of the UK's readiness for the Covid-19 pandemic?**

In closing, I provide some thoughts from our participating members on general reflections on UK readiness for the COVID-19 pandemic. Our members appeared disheartened in relation to the coordination structures used and plans which were broadly available for such an event.

*'Subsidiarity went out of the window'*

Participants mentioned *'incident fatigue'* in light of COVID-19 and a longer string of incidents (Brexit, floods, terrorism, cyber incidents) with reduced resources.

There was a feeling that nationally the approach had been too focused on risk, rather than consequences, and did not sufficiently listen to local perspectives.

*'The challenge is view of central Gov versus everyone else. They know best, they do the planning, and we will tell you what to do. We highlighted issues but they were rejected, it was not given credence. Local is seen as the enemy not part of the resilience framework.'*

There was also significant reflection that communication of national decisions and policy to the local level was ineffective and did not follow planned structures, instead finding out through public announcements. This led to a lag time for local level to implement changes and a public perception that this would be in place which increased the pressure and stress on local response.

### Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true. I understand that proceedings may be brought against anyone who makes, or causes to be made, a false statement in a document verified by a statement of truth without an honest belief of its truth.

**Signed:**

Personal Data

**Dated:** \_\_03/05/2023\_\_\_\_\_