Ready for the future:

Meeting people's needs in an emergency

September 2021

Contents

<u>Glossary</u>

CCA	The Civil Contingencies Act, passed in 2004, is the main piece of legislation guiding UK emergency response.
CCS	The Civil Contingencies Secretariat is the UK government policy lead on emergency preparedness, sitting within the Cabinet Office.
COBRA	COBR or COBRA, also known as the Civil Contingencies Committee, is convened to handle matters of national emergency or major disruption. The acronym stands for Cabinet Office Briefing Room A.
DEFRA	The Department for Energy, Food and Rural Affairs.
EPG	Emergency Preparedness Groups are local multi-agency partnerships tasked with emergency planning and preparation in Northern Ireland, similar to Local Resilience Forums (LRFs) in England and Wales and Local Resilience Partnerships (LRPs) in Scotland. EPGs differ from LRFs and LRPs in that they are governed not under the Civil Contingencies Act, but under Northern Ireland's non-statutory Civil Contingencies Framework.
LGD	The Lead Government department in an emergency.
LRF	Local Resilience Forums are English and Welsh multi-agency partnerships tasked with preparing for emergencies under the Civil Contingencies Act. They fulfil a similar function to LRPs in Scotland and EPGs in Northern Ireland. They are not statutory organisations in their own right and do not generally have their own funding, but rather consist of representatives from other organisations, such as the police, the fire service, local authorities, the NHS and the voluntary and community sector.
LRP	Local Resilience Partnerships are Scottish multi-agency partnerships tasked with preparing for emergencies under the Civil Contingencies Act. They fulfil a similar function to Local Resilience Forums (LRFs) in England and Wales and Emergency Preparedness Groups (EPGs) in Northern Ireland.
MHCLG RED	The Resilience and Emergencies Division in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, which liaises with local government and LRFs on emergency preparedness and response.
RRP	Regional Resilience Partnerships are Scottish multi-agency partnerships working at the regional level, one step above LRPs.
SCG	The Strategic Coordinating Group, sometimes called Gold, is established in the event of an emergency where multiple agencies have to be involved in the response. It usually consists of LRF members and is led by the police or another appropriate lead agency. The role of the SCG is to coordinate the response to an emergency.
VCS	The catch-all term for the voluntary and community sector, including charities such as the British Red Cross.
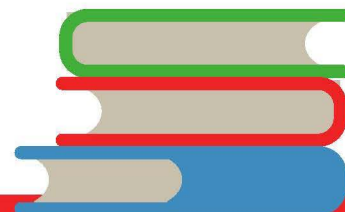
<u>Foreword</u>

The Covid-19 emergency has put the UK's civil contingencies arrangements under scrutiny. A topic of conversation once restricted to those involved in emergency planning and response now routinely enters households via televised ministerial briefings and high-profile parliamentary committee appearances.

Even prior to the pandemic, the British Red Cross was already considering how well the UK responds to emergencies. We've been active ourselves for over 150 years, and in 2019 had responded to a domestic emergency every four hours – fires, floods, terror attacks.

Through our work to date in the UK, we've witnessed too many people going without the assistance they've needed when crisis has struck – no food, no cash, no shelter, and no psychosocial support. And in those crises, we've seen how often a lack of community engagement, planning, collaboration, transparency and accountability made emergencies so much worse than they needed to be, especially for communities already in vulnerable situations.

The response to the pandemic has evolved and flexed as government, the voluntary and community sector, businesses and communities have innovated to meet changing needs. At the same time, it has become clear that, unlike a fire or a flood, the protracted nature of the pandemic has affected every family in some way. The fact, though, that some people's lives have been, and will continue to be, impacted much more than others is also impossible to ignore.

Alongside and in partnership with the Voluntary and Community Sector Emergencies Partnership (VCSEP), statutory responders, health bodies, and local and central government, the British Red Cross has been part of the complex Covid-19 response. Since March 2020, we've alone reached more than two million people in the UK, helping people with everything from food and medicine packages to transport home from hospital, and the numbers supported by the wider voluntary and community sector collectively are vastly higher. Despite these efforts, existing inequalities have been exacerbated, and without the right support during recovery, may be felt for years to come.

However, the reach of Covid-19 has also created a strong buy-in for reform. With the upcoming review of the Civil Contingencies Act, and a commitment to develop a National Resilience Strategy, as set out in the Integrated Review, we now have an opportunity to ensure that our emergency structures are ready for the future - ready to serve all communities and ensure that no one gets left behind in a crisis.

This research is several years in the making. It was planned before Covid-19 but took on an additional dimension as the pandemic changed what was meant by an emergency, and seriously challenged the existing structures and systems that make up our emergency response.

It unpicks whether current leadership, accountability and coordination structures are set up to provide an approach which prioritises meeting people's humanitarian needs in today's and future emergencies. It explores alternative options, best practice and what needs to change.

The pandemic was, and still is, a serious threat to people's lives and livelihoods. But we will face new crises, such as those brought by climate change and extreme weather. We must ensure that our emergency systems and structures are robust and fit enough to face them.

As we start to move forward from acute response into – hopefully – a more 'peacetime' phase and into recovery, we should begin by asking the question of how we can build the connections that are fundamental to individual and community resilience. By implementing and building on the recommendations set out in this report, together we can ensure the UK is resilient to future crises, whatever they might be.

Acknowledgements

1. Executive summary

While we cannot prevent emergencies entirely, we can prevent them from becoming disasters. Their worst consequences are often preventable – death, hunger, or exacerbated poor mental health.

This research aims to ensure that the Civil Contingencies Act (CCA) - or any equivalent legislation underpinning future UK emergencies, whether an extreme weather event such as a flood, or a protracted emergency such as a pandemic - is equipped to meet people's needs no matter the emergency and no matter their background.

Amid the loss and devastation wrought by the pandemic, the incredible work of emergency responders and volunteer groups has been a silver lining. The past year has strengthened working relationships, revealed the tremendous capacity and knowledge of voluntary and community groups and raised awareness of the importance of resilience. The danger is that the momentum for change and improvement gets overtaken by business as usual. Once the pandemic subsides, many involved in emergency response and recovery will have to attend to an overwhelming backlog of other work which had been set aside due to the imminent threat posed by Covid-19. But now is not the time to forget about civil contingencies. It is crucial to capture the momentum and the learnings provided by the pandemic. As one interviewee put it: "a new pandemic is just as likely next year as it was last year." The upcoming review of the CCA and the development of a National Resilience Strategy can help us achieve a more effective and human-centred emergency response in the future.

By placing people at the heart of emergency response, our communities will feel safer, more confident and protected even in a crisis. A wholly human-centred response would recognise people's diverse and holistic needs, and prioritise leaving no one behind.

The range of experience, expertise and perspectives brought together on this project have shown that UK emergency response systems are ultimately not about one group or a single government department. Good emergency response depends on all parts of the system working well, both individually and as a cohesive whole. While there is no single silver bullet for improving emergency response, the interviews and literature have helped to identify seven strands overleaf, that can jointly support an effective, human-centred response.

AMBULANCE

1 Leadership and accountability

People throughout the emergency response ecosystem work hard in emergencies, but roles and responsibilities can at times be unclear at a local and national level. This presents an opportunity to improve coordination across and between central and local governments and their partners.

This report makes the case for a clearer central government role in the planning, response, recovery and learning phases, while also facilitating local autonomy.

This will require a formalised cross-government approach and lines of accountability, official mechanisms to scrutinise and review emergency response, establishing ways to draw on the expertise of a range of stakeholders – from scientific advisors to the voluntary and community sector – and improvements to current funding processes.   See section 3.1

2 Planning

The quality of preparation arrangements varies across the country. In some instances, this is due to a lack of capacity and resourcing within LRFs, LRPs and EPGs.

Increased investment in and improved planning standards would help ensure emergency responders know what their role is, who to engage with and who is most at risk when an emergency strikes. This report highlights the importance of carrying out training exercises and fostering working relationships in peacetime, greater investment in identifying and mitigating risk ahead of time, as well as routinely drawing on the voluntary and community sector's unique, strategic insight into the communities' needs and assets.   See section 3.2

3 Collaboration across silos and organisational boundaries

No one organisation or sector can effectively meet the needs of a community in an emergency. Yet, silo working within and across organisations remain a significant issue in emergency response.

Moving away from transactional relationships that rely solely on exchanging information, towards a shared understanding of what is required to effectively respond to an emergency and how all the various components fit together is crucial to achieving a human-centred approach. To help, structural barriers, such as data sharing need to be improved.   See section 3.3

4 Community engagement

The UK's resilience to future shocks depends on our communities' ability and confidence to prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies. While this can only be achieved by working with those affected or at risk of being affected by an emergency, our emergency response systems and structures all too often disregard these crucial perspectives.

Community involvement is more than giving the community a voice – communities need to be part of every stage of the crisis response and resilience process – from planning to learning. To support this, government needs to invest in community engagement and deliberative emergency planning, and LRFs, LRPs and EPGs must be better supported to co-develop mitigation and adaptation strategies directly with the community, for example by strengthening the Resilience Standards.   See section 3.4

5 Human-centred care

Our systems, structures and legislation tend to underestimate what people need to cope and recover from an emergency. People's and communities' needs are diverse and varied, and likely to range from immediate practical needs, such as food or shelter, to psychosocial support, to information and advice.

While all of these needs are not being met universally, this report identifies two particularly urgent areas for improvement: cash assistance and psychosocial support. Both support a more personalised approach, and help communities maintain a greater sense of control, dignity, choice and confidence.

6 Active charities and volunteers

Covid-19 has shone a spotlight on the value of the voluntary and community sector – with many emergency responders and central government relying on the sector to mobilise volunteers as well as reach and build trust among seldom heard, and marginalised communities.

The sector's insights into hidden needs and vulnerabilities, and often unique ability to tap into the resources and assets within a community has also helped improve key agendas, from the rollout of vaccinations to food provision for those shielding.

Yet, the involvement of the voluntary and community sector in emergency planning, response, recovery and learning, particularly in planning and strategic decision making, is often lacking. Current legislation and guidance need to be strengthened to compel LRFs, LRPs and EPGs to collaborate with the VCS.

7 Continuously learning lessons and future-proofing

Both the literature and interviews pinpointed a tendency towards lessons learned rarely being translated into improved practice, and growing frustration around that.

Some drew on a number of recommendations made after the foot and mouth emergency, which could have improved the Covid-19 response (from worst-case scenario planning to improved early warning). Strengthening debrief processes at both a local and national level, and involving a broader range of stakeholders, including the voluntary and community sector would help.

Beyond learning lessons, there is a clear need to better prepare for evolving threats, such as climate change and extreme weather, by reviewing and updating the National Risk Register and developing climate risk resilience, response and recovery strategies.

2. <u>Introduction</u>

Over the past 20 years, UK policy makers have built an elaborate emergency response system. Rules have been set, procedures put in place and training exercises run. But, ultimately, the success or failure of this system depends on whether the needs of those affected are being met during and after an emergency.

The UK emergency response structures are designed to strike a balance between central leadership and local adaptability to deliver maximum resilience. A hands-off approach from central government combined with long-term cuts to the public sector has, however, made it hard to maintain standards in emergency

The British Red Cross has argued for a more human-centred emergency response - an approach in which organisations and systems empower people to access personalised support at times of crisis, provide support that addresses both practical and psychosocial needs equally, and continue to offer longer-term support as people recover, and rebuild their lives.[1] Because people often know best what their own needs are, human-centred approaches involve people and communities at every stage.

While few would disagree with the importance of a human-centred approach, it proves hard to put into practice. The literature suggests that institutional boundaries, departmental silos, funding constraints, lack of direction and less meaningful community engagement can all stand in the way of reform. Recent UK emergencies, hold important lessons, too. The UK government inquiry into flooding revealed insufficient involvement of communities and gaps in preparedness for climate risks;[2] the Kerslake report on the Manchester Arena attack showed the strengths and weaknesses of current approaches to recovery;[3] reviews of the Grenfell Tower Fire response exposed, among other features, a lack of personalised support;[4] and reports on the Covid-19 pandemic so far highlighted that the lessons from the foot-and-mouth outbreak, from preparing worst-case scenarios to improving early warning systems (see section 3.7), have not been fully learned.[5]

preparedness. Resilience practitioners believe that levels of preparedness differ markedly from place to place,[6] as does the support that is available during and after an emergency, in terms of emergency food provision, mental health support and financial assistance.[7] The relationship with the voluntary and community sector also differs greatly between different areas, with many places failing to make optimal use of the available resources within the VCS.[8] [9] With the lessons of recent emergencies in mind, now is the time for reform.

Are current emergency systems, structures and legislation sufficient to provide a coordinated, effective and human-centred approach to emergencies? Are these systems ready for the future? And how might they be improved? To answer these questions, this report outlines findings from a literature review and 15 interviews with policy makers and practitioners across the UK.

How do we define resilience?

The British Red Cross defines resilience as the ability of a person, community or organisation to prepare, adapt and recover in the face of adversity or challenges and maintain wellbeing, connections, and identity.

Whether it's tackling disasters, addressing health inequalities or supporting displaced people, we believe that meaningful connections between people, within communities and across agencies are fundamental for everyone. That's why we believe in working closely with people, communities and different organisations to build resilience.
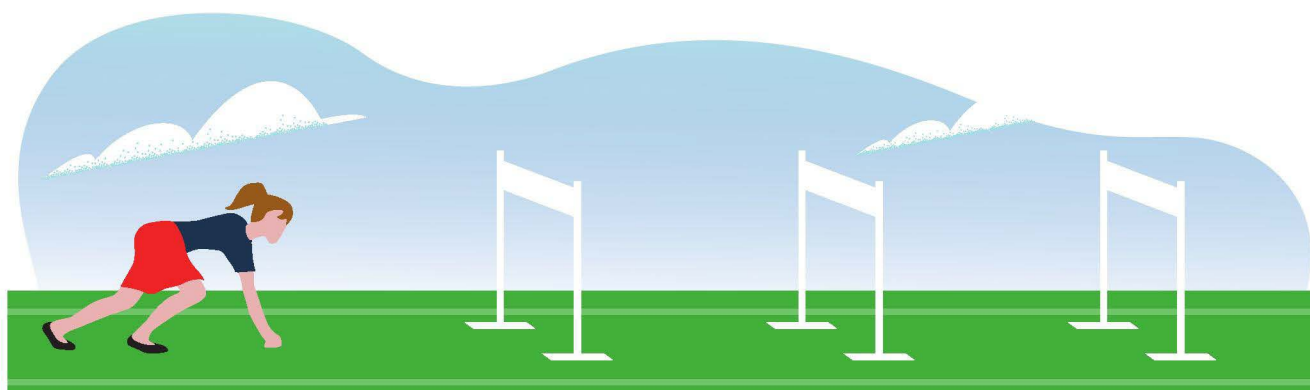
Methodology

This research is based on a review of the literature on emergency response, including academic studies, reports by charities and think tanks, government reviews and select committee reports. For more detail on the approach to this strand see Appendix A.

In addition, the research draws on interviews with 15 experts and practitioners. The discussion guide for these interviews was developed in an iterative process between Demos and the British Red Cross. Semi-structured interviews were conducted over video call in March and April of 2021. The list of interviewees included representatives from government and the civil service (five interviewees, including from devolved governments), local government (four), the voluntary and community sector (four), and statutory agencies (two). The interviewees worked across the UK, including three in Wales, three in Northern Ireland and three in Scotland. The conversations were transcribed and coded using a mixture of inductive and deductive thematic coding to draw out shared themes. These themes form the basis of this report.

The British Red Cross has also consulted a range of internal and external stakeholders working on emergency response, from the voluntary and public sectors, on the report's recommendations.

3. <u>**Key Findings**</u>

Background

At the turn of the millennium, emergencies in the UK were governed under Cold War-era civil defence legislation. A number of emergencies, such as the fuel protests and floods of 2000 and the foot and mouth disease outbreak of 2001 convinced many in government of the need for a major overhaul of UK civil contingencies legislation.[10]

The new legislation needed to be flexible enough to deal with a variety of emergencies, from power outages and minor floods to disease outbreaks and terror attacks. After a period of consultation, the Civil Contingencies Act (CCA) received royal assent in 2004. It remains the primary framework for responding to emergencies within the UK.

The CCA governs the statutory responsibilities that responders have in planning for and responding to a crisis, along with accompanying non-statutory guidance. The full Act applies directly to England and forms the basis of equivalent legislation in Scotland and Wales, while most emergency preparation practice in Northern Ireland is governed under a non-statutory Civil Contingencies Framework instead.[11] [12] Among other entitlements, devolved governments have the right to issue their own guidance and to monitor and enforce devolved duties under the CCA.[13] In a larger-scale emergency, a UK government department and/or a devolved government department may lead the response, depending on the nature of the emergency.

As envisioned in the CCA, most emergencies are dealt with locally by local responders working to local action plans. Local Resilience Forums (LRFs) in England and Wales, and Local and Regional Resilience Partnerships (LRPs and RRPs), the equivalent in Scotland, are tasked with planning for emergencies. Instead of LRFs, under the Civil Contingencies Framework, Northern Ireland has similar structures, which are called Emergency Preparedness Groups (EPGs). These groups are multi-agency partnerships involving representatives from public services that have a statutory duty to respond, such as the emergency services, local authorities, the Environment Agency and the NHS, as well as groups that do not have a statutory role in emergency response, such as local voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations.

At the level of UK government, responsibility for emergency planning is split between the Civil Contingencies Secretariat within the Cabinet Office and the Resilience and Emergencies Division within the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). When an emergency is designated significant (e.g. severe weather), a lead government department is allocated responsibility. Should an emergency be declared serious (e.g. a terror attack), the Civil Contingencies Committee (more commonly known as COBRA or COBR) is involved. If the emergency is more devastating still – and this would be unprecedented – it may be designated catastrophic (e.g. a Chernobyl-scale nuclear accident), at which point the response will be run centrally from COBRA.

What are Category 1 and 2 responders?

The CCA places duties on two different groups of responders:

Category 1 includes organisations at the core of emergency response such as emergency services (the 'blue lights'), local authorities and NHS bodies. They have a duty to assess risks and to put in place emergency plans, among other things.

Category 2 responders have fewer duties. Their main duty is to cooperate with other responders. This category would include utility operators, transport companies and health bodies such as CCGs.

Figure 1: Example actors that make up and interact with LRFs

SUPPORTING ORGANISATIONS

CATEGORY 2 RESPONDERS

CATEGORY 1 RESPONDERS

Local authorities	NHS
Police forces	Public Health England
Fire services	
Ambulance service	Port authorities
HM coastguard	Environment agency

VCS

Military

Utilities

Transport

Met Office

Government departments*

Health and Safety Executive

* Including MHCLG, Cabinet Office, Home Office, etc.

In the case of Covid-19, the UK government chose to bypass the emergency powers of the CCA and pass a new Coronavirus Act instead, raising questions about the suitability of the CCA, especially for protracted emergencies.

Towards the beginning of the Covid-19 emergency, the CCA was deemed too strict and inflexible, and difficult to use in a protracted emergency of this sort. For example, under the Act regulations would lapse after 30 days and need to be renewed with the approval of Parliament.[14]

Figure 2: Government response to emergencies, as outlined in the UK Concept of Operations (Conops) guidance

National coverage

Cross-region

Regional coverage

Cross-force

Single scene

Catastrophic – Level 3
Central direction from COBRA

Serious – Level 2
Coordinated central response led by LGD from COBRA

Significant – Level 1
LGD led central response, COBRA not involved

Local response with Government Office providing two-way channel to central Govt/LGD

Local response only

→ **Impact** —————→

Minimal parliamentary interest ——————→ significant parliamentary interest ——————→ dominating parliamentary/national debate
Minimal LGD operational interest —►through Regional Resilience Teams/Regional Office —►LGD crisis centre —► collective response —► central direction
Minimal LGD policy interest —► monitoring through Regional Resilience Teams —► LGD actively involved —► strategic challenge —► overwhelming

Further exploration of the reasons why Part 2, the emergency powers aspect of the CCA wasn't used is needed to ensure our future emergency legislation is fit for all kinds of emergencies.

Since its inception, the UK's Civil Contingencies infrastructure has undergone a number of reforms, often in response to large emergencies. Now, two decades after the 2000/2001 events which gave rise to the Civil Contingencies Act, and in light of the devastating consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic, it is due for another evolution. The upcoming review of the Civil Contingencies Act should be taken as an opportunity to improve emergency planning and response.[15]

In addition, as part of its Integrated Review, the UK government announced that it will start to develop a comprehensive National Resilience Strategy in the year 2021 and has brought forward a consultation, touching on central features of the UK civil contingencies architecture, including a review of the role and responsibilities of LRFs.[16] With the review of the Civil Contingencies Act and the development of a National Resilience Strategy on the horizon, there is now momentum behind policy change. This momentum should be seized upon to improve UK resilience and preparedness.

The Resilience Cycle

Are UK emergency response frameworks and practices well suited to facilitate a human-centred approach?

Key improvements are needed at each stage of the resilience cycle:

Preparation

The first stage in the resilience cycle is the preparation stage. Risk assessment and emergency planning are two of the statutory duties for Category 1 responders during this stage, as stated under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 (CCA). This is the time to build capacity, resources and frameworks for human-centred processes. Local Resilience Forums and Partnerships should assess the risks to their community (usually taken from the National Risk Register compiled by the Cabinet Office), develop plans and conduct training exercises. Three questions are particularly pertinent at the preparation stage:

1.   Are communities sufficiently involved in emergency planning?

2.   Do existing plans consider a broad range of human needs specific to their local communities?

3.   Are statutory responders able to set aside organisational differences and break through institutional silos to meet the holistic needs of the affected community?

Response

The response phase is generally split into two separate phases: crisis management and consequence management.[17]

Crisis management deals with the immediate and direct effects of an emergency and may include actions such as fighting fires, evacuating people, search and rescue, etc. (typically, but not exclusively, performed by Category 1 responders). The crisis management phase can last from minutes to months depending on the nature of the emergency, with a terror incident taking a very different trajectory to a pandemic.[18]

Consequence management, sometimes also called impact management, usually runs concurrently with crisis management and deals with alleviating the impact of crises. It includes "managing wider consequences and services such as restoring transport networks or electricity supplies, managing community relationships, and providing ongoing shelter to displaced persons."[19]

By their nature these two phases will also involve different organisations or different departments within organisations. For example, the fire brigade or the ambulance service may be needed in the crisis management phase and not in the consequence management phase, while specialist responses from the utilities sector may only be required in the consequence management phase.

Recovery

Recovery is "defined as the process of rebuilding, restoring and rehabilitating the community following an emergency."[20] The Cabinet Office guidance on recovery sets out several key recovery principles, specifying that it is not simply designed to replace "what has been destroyed" but that it is "a complex social and developmental process." Government guidance states that recovery is "best approached from the perspective of community development" with specific attention paid to "the complex, dynamic and protracted nature of recovery processes and the changing needs of affected individuals."

Learning

In a report compiled for the Civil Contingencies Secretariat into the learning process after emergencies, the Emergency Planning Society emphasises that organisations and countries struggle to learn lessons from past emergencies.[21] According to the report, we "continually fail to convert 'lessons identified' from emergency response into embedded 'lessons learned'."

The resilience cycle

Preparation: improvements can be made to **involve communities**, to ensure **uniformly high standards in emergency planning** and to foster **collaboration** at the planning stage. Communities still feel left out of the process. In the move towards a human-centred emergency response, they will have to be given greater input. National government may need to take on a greater role in ensuring high standards in resilience planning and in ensuring organisations can still make strides in collaboration at the planning stage, especially through **training exercises**.

Response: a human-centred response requires organisations to **work across boundaries** to meet need. The literature suggests collaboration remains a perpetual difficulty. To facilitate interagency cooperation, new **data sharing** guidance may be necessary. **Cash-based assistance** could further empower those affected.

What can be improved at each stage of the resilience cycle?

Learning: it is notoriously difficult to truly learn the lessons from past emergencies. To make sure those affected are at the heart of the learning process, **the voluntary and community sector should be afforded a central role in connecting lived experience with government processes**. Clear and accountable leadership will also aid the learning process, for example through a **Civil Contingencies Advisory Group**.

Recovery: emergencies in recent years suggest that much remains to be done to meet people's diverse needs after an emergency. The Scottish guidance offers a useful framework for psychosocial support, emphasising the importance of both **practical and psychological support**. Training for responders must explicitly include considerations around people's diverse needs to embed these concerns into practice.

3.1 Leadership and accountability

" **[In an emergency you have to] stitch a whole range of responders together. Public sector bodies, the so-called critical infrastructure operators (electricity, gas, water, etc.), and then a lot of other people such as the voluntary and community sector. They've got to be brought together around a consistent approach, because when it comes to it, they've all got to fit together at the scene of the emergency, very smoothly. They've all got to prepare the same way and train the same way, and so on, so it's nationwide, and it's consistent.**

Bruce Mann,
Former head of the Civil Contingencies Secretariat

The first of the seven areas for improvement concerns both national and local leadership and accountability. Leadership is needed to provide direction to the resilience policy agenda,

which several interviewees felt was particularly urgent due to a perception that the UK's ability to respond to large-scale emergencies had been eroded over the past decade or so. Bruce Mann, who guided the CCA through Parliament in 2004 as the then-head of the Civil Contingencies Secretariat, said:

" **The Civil Contingencies Act lifted the game from the very bad place that the UK was in, in 2001. I think that damage to basic civil protection capabilities has been caused over the past 10 years by reductions in expenditure in key capability areas and by an emphasis on other contingencies, including planning for exit from the EU. This needs to be rectified. Next, I think what Covid has shown us is we need to lift the game again, out onto a higher plane to deal with those truly catastrophic emergencies.**

Current emergency response leadership structures

Current emergency response leadership structures have been criticised for lacking clear lines of accountability and clear points of contact, as well as for discouraging a consistent and joined-up approach across government, between national and local government and with the broader cohort of emergency response stakeholders. This is because different government departments are responsible for different elements of the emergencies cycle, there is no named lead minister in peacetime, and no formal structures to support a cross-government approach.

Each emergency is allocated a lead government department, with responsibility to prepare for, and provide the overall management of the government's response and recovery.[22] The lead department is also required to coordinate input and support from other government departments. However, each department remains responsible and accountable for their individual activities and policy areas. This limits the lead department's ability to coordinate other government departments, or to be held accountable to Parliament or the public. It also limits government's capacity and motivation to better prepare for future emergencies and learn from previous ones.

In addition, depending on the incident, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government or the Home Office can both act as a conduit between local and national actors, liaising and exchanging information with the relevant Strategic Coordinating Group. This can duplicate and complicate relationships between national and local actors and structures.

'Lifting the game' requires leadership, accountability and resources. To this end, a number of different organisations have recently made the case for rethinking the government's emergency response structures. The Local Government Association has called for a review of the CCA and particularly of the split responsibility between the Civil Contingencies Secretariat at the Cabinet Office and the Resilience and Emergencies Division at MHCLG, which might help to provide a clearer, more unified point of leadership.[23] The think tank Reform has made a number of recommendations to improve leadership and oversight, including the institution of a Civil Contingencies Advisory Group in Whitehall and a Civil Contingencies Select Committee in Parliament.[24]

The creation of a select committee and advisory group

The new Civil Contingencies Select Committee would serve to scrutinise emergency preparation and response, to drive learning and to hold inquiries where necessary. It would provide proactive scrutiny, break through silos and offer a human-centred focus. At present, many existing select committees provide excellent scrutiny of specific departments or specific types of emergencies, such as flooding, but as the Reform report points out, "this kind of scrutiny is infrequent and inconsistent across government and across different risks."[25] The new committee, in being focused on all civil contingencies, would be able to address systemic issues in a sustained, proactive manner and look beyond silos.

To ensure that the new select committee builds on existing efforts, its members might be partially drawn from the chairs and members of related select committees and those with a departmental focus. The committee would also be useful in providing a human-centred focus, as opposed to a focus on security or technical aspects.

In addition, to improve the UK civil contingencies architecture, governments will have to draw on sources outside of government itself to combat groupthink and to make maximum use of existing expertise.[26] The proposed Independent Civil Contingencies Advisory Group would consist of academics and professionals in the field and its role would be to provide independent expertise and evaluation. This would differ from SAGE insofar as it would take a broader look at emergency response, in contrast to the scientific, health and academic remit that SAGE has. This would be a welcome source of independent expertise in emergency preparedness, and by including the VCS, this Advisory Group could provide not just technical expertise but also a human focus in emergency response.

> **Recommendation 1:** The UK government should move a motion in Parliament to establish a Civil Contingencies Select Committee.[27]

> **Recommendation 2:** The UK government should establish a Civil Contingencies Advisory Group, comprised of experts from academia and practice, including the VCS. This Advisory Group should build on the work of the National Preparedness Commission, which is already holistically considering the UK's resilience and preparedness.

The creation of an Emergencies Minister, supported by a cross-government approach

Some organisations have flagged the need for a clearer point of contact on emergency response within the UK government, before, during and after an emergency strikes.[28] This could be achieved by appointing a minister who would work with different departments in preparing for and responding to crises. In the event of a large-scale emergency, they would also represent the voice of those affected within government, similar to the role played by Tessa Jowell in her role as the Minister for Humanitarian Assistance in the aftermath of the 7/7 bombings. This minister would be tasked with driving cooperation between different government departments on the matter of emergency preparedness and response.

> **Recommendation 3:** The UK government should create the role of an Emergencies Minister within Government. This role should sit within the Cabinet Office, be a Cabinet level post, and provide cross-government coordination, leadership and accountability before, during and after an emergency.

Devolution and local autonomy

In strengthening leadership and accountability, however, the UK government should resist the urge for centralisation and control. Judging from expert interviews, devolution seems to have had a positive impact on resilience. Interviewees in the devolved nations were generally very positive about devolved leadership. Working together at a smaller scale makes it easier to have everybody in the same room, which, in turn, facilitates cooperation and reduces the risk of duplicating efforts. It also allows for a response tailored to local needs and capabilities.

Regional collaboration in England, either through ad-hoc arrangements or through metro region structures, was also deemed a success. For example, when Bristol had an outbreak of a new variant of the coronavirus in February 2021, LRFs throughout the southwest mobilised quickly to test thousands of people. Similarly, metro areas such as London have pushed forward innovations in cooperation, for example through peer review at the LRF level. Interviewees involved in recovery after the Manchester Arena attack also remarked positively on the way devolved powers had been used. They said that devolved funding and decision-making powers had enabled a swift response and facilitated clear, two-way communication between decision-makers and those working on the ground. Academic reviews have similarly found that devolution to the metro region and a collaborative culture enabled joined up working in the aftermath of the emergency in Manchester.[29]

The need for better join up between central and local government has also been observed. Where local governments had to work directly with central government during Covid-19, there was sometimes a perceived lack of consideration of how policy announcements would affect local areas, particularly during the early months of the pandemic and when local restrictions came into play.[30] Local government interviewees said the following:

> " [It is hard] when announcements and policy are set nationally with no notice, with no reaction time, with no ability to prepare. And this was certainly the case in the early days of the pandemic, where there was just policy on the hoof, and things were just being thrown in there, like we were expected to know and be able to deal with it sort of immediately. And it just wasn't possible to do it.
>
> The lack of ability to plan and think through things has been a real constraint. Also, sometimes the lack of coordination across and between government departments is a real challenge. And [...] we then have to try and knit it and stitch it all together.

Herein lies the challenge for the UK government: to provide strong leadership while also working closely across different agencies, without overriding local initiatives, devolved autonomy and local knowledge.

The British Red Cross has previously recommended establishing early warning systems to make sure local emergency response partners are notified in due time of emergencies or policy changes which will affect the area they operate in. This recommendation should be actioned as a priority.

Recommendation 4: The UK government should establish effective early dialogue and warning systems for local emergency response partners, including local authorities, health bodies, the voluntary and community sector – and specifically the Voluntary and Community Sector Emergencies Partnership (VCSEP) – in areas that are about to be affected by new policies, to better enable an effective and well-planned human-centred response.

Funding

A further policy change which would help to strike the balance between central government leadership and local autonomy is moving towards pre-agreed recovery funding. As it stands, interviewees said, recovery funding can be slow to materialise, quick to run out and limited in both who can be compensated and for what.

In the aftermath of an emergency, local authorities in England and Scotland can submit costs to the Bellwin scheme (if activated by the UK government), but this funding avenue only covers the costs of emergency response, for example additional costs to Category 1 responders for higher usage.[31] The Bellwin scheme is only activated in the aftermath of an emergency and therefore does not provide immediate funding for early action costs; it does not extend to recovery costs or to all parts of the emergency response eco-system; and there is no automatic

entitlement to financial assistance.[32] To fund recovery costs, the relevant government department may activate an ad-hoc funding scheme, but these funds are strictly at ministerial discretion.[33] When the original CCA was passed, it was assumed local authorities would generally pay for recovery costs, but cuts to local government have limited their capacity to do so.

A related issue is whether current funding frameworks and practices allow for sufficiently long-term engagement with those affected by an emergency. The Select Committee report on flooding records a number of criticisms, as community groups find that support tends to dissipate after the initial response, even though these community groups find that the average person is out of their home for about nine months following flood damage.[34] For events such as floods, which are cyclical and predictable, the government could consider pre-agreeing financial support and mobilising this funding and support once flooding is likely, rather than waiting for the emergency to wreak havoc.

Targeted local spend in the immediate aftermath of an emergency can make a big difference to the future of a community. For example, one interviewee suggested that a local shop which is not able to reopen in the two weeks after a flooding is much more likely to go permanently out of business compared to a shop which is able to reopen quickly. Pre-agreed funding for recovery would help to swiftly mobilise and disseminate business continuity support as well as other forms of community support, and help to ensure communities are supported to cope and recover from emergencies based on need rather than affluence.

Recommendation 5: The UK government should review the Bellwin scheme's scope, and trial a scheme for pre-agreeing to financial support for recovery from specific emergencies such as floods and terror attacks. The level of pre-agreed support should be regularly reviewed to ensure it is adequate for dealing with the long-term aftereffects of emergencies.

3.2 Planning

> **You have to exercise and work together as often as you can…
> The more you do it, the more effective you are.**
>
> Paul Netherton, National police resilience lead

Training exercises

Under the CCA, responsibility for emergency planning lies with Local Resilience Forums (in England and Wales) and Resilience Partnerships (in Scotland). In peacetime, these partnership groups have to draw up plans and exercises for civil contingencies. Interviewees were near-unanimous in their emphasis on the importance of exercising and fostering working relationships as a priority over developing detailed plans. Jim Savege, Chief executive of Aberdeenshire Council, said:

> **So, if I reflect back to most of the incidents I've dealt with, in all of my time, I can only think of once where I picked up, read and followed the plan precisely. Otherwise, what you're doing is you are responding to the incident in front of you, and working closely with the agencies and the colleagues that you know well.**

Although it is important to have a written plan, practitioners emphasised the importance of plans being lived and incorporated within routines, as opposed to a technical document on a computer. Joan McCaffrey, the Northern Ireland Regional Lead for Local Government Civil Contingencies, said:

National police resilience lead Paul Netherton made a similar point:

> **That's probably the most important thing. You have to exercise and work together as often as you can, doesn't matter whether it's a counterterrorism exercise or a flooding exercise, or whatever. The more you do it, the more effective you are. And you've got the [Resilience] Standards [set by the Civil Contingencies Secretariat] to operate against so you can test yourself and learn against the standards.**

These views are reflected in the emergency response literature. A training exercise was held in Manchester only a few months prior to the Manchester Arena attack, which greatly helped different agencies work together with confidence.[36] Training exercises were also held in the West Midlands in the months before the 7/7 bombings in London, in response to attacks seen elsewhere in Europe. Paul Netherton further emphasised the importance of involving the VCS to ensure they can fulfil important functions such as coordinating volunteers, setting up rest centres and activating flood wardens and community networks.

> **In the past, we had very long plans that in some cases sat on shelves. I think that to work, a plan really needs to be something that's in your head. Yes it's important that there's a plan, but if you don't automatically know what your role and responsibilities are within the plan and what the expectations are on you or your organisation within the overall co-ordination, then that's a barrier from the outset. From learning, we are now developing concise plans, very much aligned to the JESIP principles.[35]**

This is in line with the recommendations in the Resilience Standards[37], which are a set of non-binding standards outlining best practice for Local Resilience Forums.

Category 1 responders such as the police, ambulance and fire services are required to have an emergency plan, including a schedule for exercising plans on a rotational basis, but due to lack of funding, capacity or leadership, some areas exercise far less frequently than others. The Resilience Standards suggest that LRFs may wish to consider holding at least one multi-agency and multi-command level exercise per year, which is considered 'leading practice' (above and beyond 'good practice') but not required.

It is mandatory for LRFs to meet at least twice a year and, during the pandemic, many LRF partners have been meeting one another far more frequently in SCGs that were set up for the Covid-19 response. Insofar as this has strengthened working relationships, this will greatly improve the country's ability to respond to emergencies going forward. Frequent contact and regular training exercises will allow this energy to be maintained and harnessed for resilience. To facilitate this, UK and devolved governments should adequately fund training exercises and government liaison officers should register how frequently they are held. In addition, in peer review structures (as recommended below) LRFs, RRPs and EPGs should be assessed on how frequently they carry out training exercises.

> **Recommendation 6:** UK and devolved government departments should fund and support effective scenario-based training exercises engaging all relevant sectors several times a year. Government Liaison Officers should register how frequently each resilience forum exercises. Exercises should involve senior as well as junior personnel from the relevant agencies, and include the VCS as well as statutory organisations.

Preparedness capacity

An advantage of the UK's localised approach to emergency management is the possibility of adapting local strategies to meet local risks, needs and circumstances. A possible disadvantage is that some areas might be less prepared than others – a number of interviewees suggested that the quality of preparation arrangements varied markedly across the country. LRFs, LRPs and EPGs themselves are not statutory bodies, but rather multi-agency partnerships, which means that the members all have other, daily responsibilities – as police commissioners or local government chief executives for example – and working on preparedness requires them to free up time and resources from their other responsibilities. When they are already stretched for time and money, it becomes difficult to allocate enough time to preparedness.

The policy question is whether the UK and devolved governments should play a greater role in ensuring best practice is shared, and that national standards, such as those set by the Civil Contingencies Secretariat in the Resilience Standards, are maintained.[38] At present, funds are not ring-fenced and LRFs are not subject to inspections. Lord Toby Harris, chair of the National Preparedness Commission, argued for ring-fencing emergency preparation funds and inspections to ensure LRFs are achieving good practice as defined in the Resilience Standards, saying:

> **The nature of emergency planning is that it is preparing for something which might not happen. Nobody will notice you spent the money and you've got all these other demands on your time… But ultimately it is the duty of the state to protect the public, the state should make sure there are basic levels of provision across the country.**

Others, particularly local governments, argue that the problem is a broader issue of local government capacity. It would be possible to ring-fence preparedness funding or to mount an inspection regime, but local governments generally argue this would create a greater bureaucratic burden on organisations that already have significant demands on their resources and would stand in the way of creating the organisational capacity that allows local governments and LRFs to operate in a swift and agile manner:

"*For us, it has been essential to have the agility and flexibility to redeploy people*", said one local government official. "*It might mean they are doing something different from their usual day to day, but that agility has been fundamentally important.*" In other words, it might not be sufficient to have limited ring-fenced funding for a dedicated resilience officer, as a swift and capable local government response requires skills and capacity throughout the organisation.

Whether ring-fenced or not, interviewees agreed that additional resources for preparation were needed. The Local Government Association, for example, have argued that executing all the tasks demanded of LRFs to a high standard will require additional resources (LRFs currently do not generally have resources of their own, except for ad-hoc arrangements, for example for No-Deal Brexit planning in ports).[39] LRFs have been tasked with more and more extensive duties, especially during the preparations for a possible No-Deal Brexit and during the Covid-19 pandemic, arguably without commensurate increases in funding. In addition, the UK emergency response system is heavily reliant on local government,

which has been affected by significant reductions in government funding over the last decade.[40] This in turn has affected emergency preparedness. There is a widespread sense that, partially as a result, the quality of local plans and the state of local resilience varies widely.[41] Several interviewees echoed the view that cuts to public services had negatively affected UK resilience. "*Councils have just about pulled through during Covid*", one interviewee said, "*but at the expense of doing everything else.*"

To remedy this lack of resourcing, the UK government should set up a Resilience Fund. This fund could be run from the Civil Contingencies Secretariat, possibly jointly with the RED division. Following a process of consultation on where the money is most urgently needed, it would be run through a number of streams, for example to provide direct funding to LRFs, for community engagement programmes, and to build capacity and mutual understanding among first responders.

Recommendation 7: The UK government should create a Resilience Fund for LRFs to invest in emergency preparedness. This should focus on working within and across sectors to plan, identify need, and build relationships as well as invest in parts of their local emergency preparation and response systems, which have seen a decline in funding in recent years, from blue light services and local government to VCS organisations.

Peer reviews

A middle ground would be to promote peer review structures, which are currently recommended in the Resilience Standards but not yet widely used. Jim Savege of Aberdeenshire Council said the following:

> **When I was in local government in England, there were lots of inspections… so you did a lot of review work. The alternative is to create local resilience partnerships and encourage collaborative or joint working… In my experience, most people are open to share and learn, they don't want to be dictated to. So, I think if you can take an empowered approach still, but with an assurance mechanism in place that enables people to improve stuff, as opposed to a regulatory approach, that will probably work better.**

Prior to the pandemic, trials had started in London in which boroughs peer reviewed one another against the Resilience Standards for London.[42] The Local Government Association has supported the peer review experiment in six boroughs (Brent, Ealing, Kingston, Merton, Richmond and Wandsworth).[43]

Peer review could sit alongside light-touch guidance and support from the UK government. For example, the MHCLG RED team has assigned a government liaison officer to each LRF in England for the duration of the pandemic, which has been a useful source of guidance and information for LRFs according to interviewees. Beyond the pandemic, these officers could play a continued role in supporting LRFs to set and meet high standards.

Recommendation 8: The government should continue providing a government liaison officer for each LRF beyond the pandemic.

Recommendation 9: UK and devolved governments should encourage and support peer review among LRFs, LRPs and EPGs (the Scottish and Northern Irish equivalents of LRFs), based on the Resilience Standards. The peer review process should actively involve the group's VCS representatives.
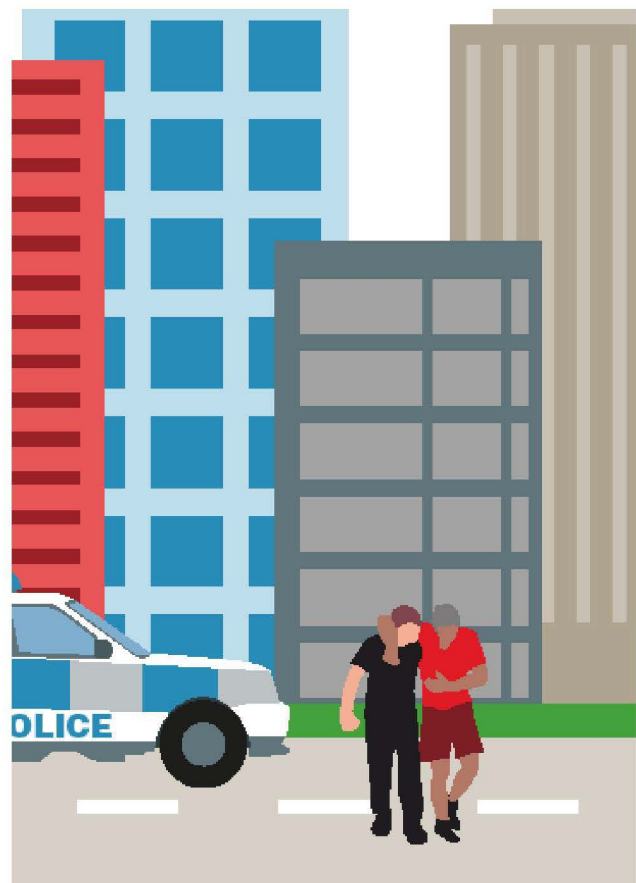
Risk and vulnerability assessment

LRFs prepare for emergency situations at the local level. They identify local risks, based on Cabinet Office risk assessments, and assess how a potential crisis might affect their local communities.[44] Often, LRFs follow the six-step process for risk assessment that is accepted as good practice. It involves 'a cycle of identifying potential hazards within the local context, assessing the risks, and considering how those risks should be managed'.[45]

An emergency impacts on different individuals and groups within a population in very different ways. The Cabinet Office's Community Resilience Development Framework recognises the need to 'prioritise support to those communities deemed to be a greater risk e.g. due to their location geography, demographics, socioeconomic and cultural circumstances'.[46]

In 2019, a British Red Cross review of LRF plans found that LRFs needed to go much further to consider and address the varied vulnerabilities faced by local populations. Only 30 per cent of LRF plans (8 of 27) included a definition of vulnerability, and not all plans included measures for identifying and helping vulnerable people.[47]

Therefore, the British Red Cross believes that the risk assessment process conducted by LRFs should include an assessment of a communities' specific vulnerabilities. Tools such as the British Red Cross Covid-19 Vulnerability Index[48], developed during Covid-19 to inform local responses could help guide this process. This tool looked at clinical (e.g. older age and underlying health conditions), economic (e.g. UC claimants and at-risk job sectors) and social vulnerability (barriers to housing and services, poor living environment, air quality, and digital exclusion) as well as health and wellbeing (mental health, loneliness) across the country.

> **Recommendation 10:** In addition to regularly assessing the risk of an emergency occurring, as part of their duty to assess risk under the CCA, LRFs should be explicitly required to identify the specific needs and vulnerabilities of their community in particular emergencies, and their plans should address these needs accordingly.
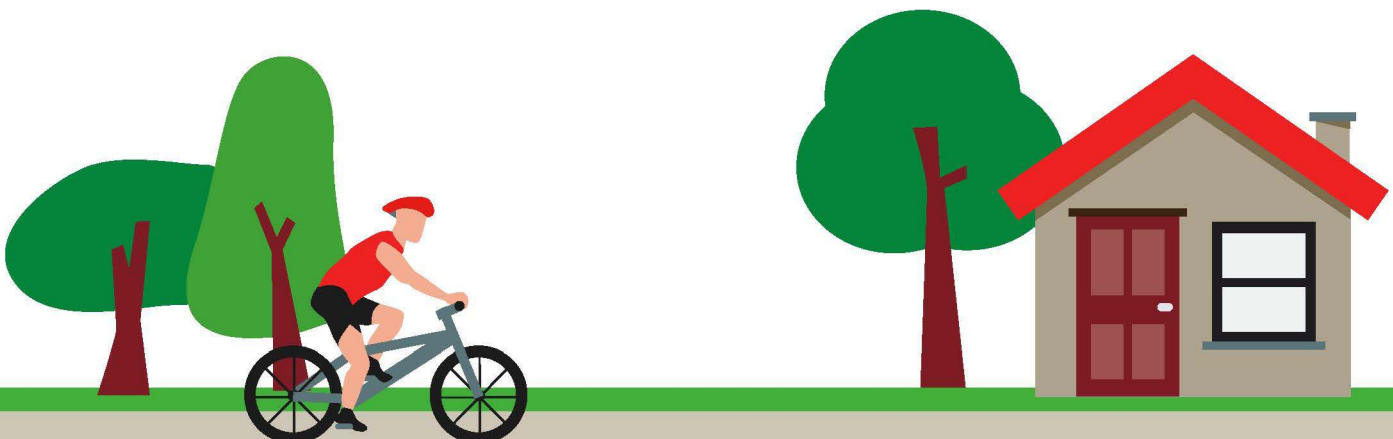
3.3 Collaboration across silos and organisational boundaries

> **The key message in any disaster is to work as a team. Because by its very nature it will overwhelm a single organisation. You've got to work as a team, with all the agencies around the table, to a common strategy, in order to have the best result.**

Paul Netherton, National police resilience lead

Even in relatively minor emergencies, such as common storms, a range of agencies will be involved in responding, including emergency services, local government, the Environment Agency and the NHS. The VCS should also be involved, as CCA guidance states that Category 1 responders should 'have regard to' the voluntary sector[49] (but there are questions over whether this is a strong enough reference to compel collaboration in practice, which is explored in section 3.6).

Former Civil Contingencies Secretariat head Bruce Mann described the need to "stitch together" first responders, public sector bodies, critical infrastructure operators and the voluntary and charitable sector, as one of the major challenges in creating a functioning emergency response system: "*They've got to be brought together around a consistent approach. Because when it comes to it, they've all got to fit together at the scene of the emergency very smoothly. They've all got to prepare the same way and train the same way, and so on.*" One of the most striking examples of a lack of collaboration and coordination comes from a study of recovery after flooding in Hull:

Without proper collaboration, agencies will not be able to meet people's needs in a holistic manner, generating frustration and possibly mistrust.

Despite a shared aim of handling the emergency and protecting lives, siloed working and organisational boundaries remain a constant issue in emergency response. These issues emerge in various ways during preparation, response, recovery and learning – in other words, at all stages of the resilience cycle. For example, The Public Accounts Committee found that Exercise Cygnus, the UK government's 2016 training exercise for handling an influenza pandemic, had failed to include all relevant people, despite involving 950 people from 12 departments.[51] As a result, the Treasury and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy were not sufficiently prepared to handle the specific economic impact of a pandemic, such as Covid-19 and relied on experiences from handling the 2008 financial crisis instead.[52] One academic study of an emergency response operation cautioned: "effective cooperation across agencies requires more than merely the exchange of information and… developing a shared understanding is a crucial – but labour-intensive – process."[53]

> **After the flood waters dispersed, residents were told to place their water soaked furnishings in front of their homes to dry and prevent mildew. Simultaneously, the government contracted for debris removal… On the day of debris pickup, the contractor's crews [who were unfamiliar with the area] swept through the neighbourhood thinking that anything in front of the homes was flooding debris. They picked it up and, to the horror of residents, tossed family heirlooms and perfectly good furnishings into large trucks where they were crushed.[50]**

This is a particularly egregious example of the importance of collaboration, or of the serious consequences when it is lacking.

Data sharing

One difficult aspect of a multi-agency emergency response regards data sharing between different organisations, including the VCS. One interviewee who chaired an LRF said, "It's a real minefield at the moment I think. I've seen [data guidance and legislation] can actually inhibit rather than help." Lack of clarity over which information can be shared can lead to a fragmented awareness of who is at risk and who is affected and may delay crucial interventions.

One interviewee recalled a situation in which information about the death count following an emergency was not shared, to the extent that different services were operating under different estimates. Reluctance to share data may also mean that victims are not helped as quickly as they could be or are asked to recount their story several times, which can feel unnecessarily retraumatising. Similar issues were at play in the aftermath of the 7/7 bombings in London in 2005. In its learning lessons report, the UK government wrote:

> **Limitations on the initial collection and subsequent sharing of data between the police and humanitarian support agencies hampered the connection of survivors to support services like the Assistance Centre. The concern at the time was that the Data Protection Act might prevent the sharing of personal data without the explicit consent of those concerned. As a result, there were delays in information reaching survivors about the support services available.**[54]

Partially in response to the 7/7 bombings, the 2007 guidance on data sharing in emergencies was published by the Civil Contingencies Secretariat, which seeks to make it easier to share data in an emergency. However, the data sharing guidance has by now become somewhat outdated.[55] Since 2007, data legislation in the UK has changed significantly, most notably because of the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA). The existing guidance refers exclusively to the Data Protection Act of 1998, which differs from the DPA 2018 in a number of key respects (including in its rules on digital surveillance, accountability and the right to be forgotten). The Information Commissioner's Office has laid out a number of principles as guidance, including the principle that emergency responders should consider the risk of not sharing data, as well as the risk in sharing data.

Although the DPA 2018 makes provisions for situations where a person's "vital interests"[56] are at risk, i.e. when you must process personal data to protect someone's life, it can be hard to apply these abstract principles to concrete emergencies. For example, after the Manchester Arena attack, those coordinating the mental health response wanted to reach out to all ticket holders. Interviewee Dr. Alan Barrett of the Manchester Resilience Hub said:

> **We had the advantage that it occurred at a ticketed event. So first of all, we said, are we able to get hold of that data? So that's where we asked our colleagues at the local authority, who were in charge of the response, whether they would on our behalf, make that request. Three large ticketing companies between them catered for all of the tickets that were purchased. With the exception of a small number of cash box office purchases. There was a bit of a delay, there was concern that people's information was going to get used for reasons other than the reason for which they provided the information.**

Getting hold of and preparing the data took about 10 weeks. In this event, this did not delay timelines as clinical guidelines at the time recommended an initial period of watchful waiting before reaching out. Nevertheless, it reveals considerable hurdles in data sharing in emergency response.

This suggests there is scope for translating the principles of current data protection legislation into concrete guidelines, with accompanying examples. Not only would this enable a more agile and human-centred response, it may also help to identify people who are particularly vulnerable, and allow agencies to better support those with trauma from an emergency, as it could also save them from having to tell their story over and over again to different agencies.

Recommendation 11: The Civil Contingencies Secretariat and DCMS should liaise with the Information Commissioner's Office to provide clearer guidelines on how to manage privacy and confidentiality when sharing data in the event of an emergency. This should allow data sharing with all emergency response partners, including the VCS. These guidelines should be clear and simple, and tested as part of practice exercises. They should cover not just emergency response but also planning and recovery.

How has the VCS demonstrated effective collaboration during the Covid-19 pandemic?

When the request came in to support the UK's first attempt at mass Covid-19 testing in Liverpool in November 2020, members of the Voluntary and Community Sector Emergencies Partnership (VCSEP) stepped up to assist the effort to test Liverpool's population. The successful response was the result of effective collaboration between the British Red Cross, RE:ACT, Muslim Charities Forum, St John Ambulance, Liverpool Charity and Voluntary Services, and Sefton Council for Voluntary Services.

The response required immediate assistance from 50 volunteers, manning the site for 12 hours a day. The partnership provided first aid and medical support, logistical support, and identified vulnerable people. Partners reacted quickly to the request for support, having the testing site up and running in a matter of days. Multiple VCS partners worked together to provide support:

- Volunteers were mobilised by St John Ambulance, British Red Cross, RE:ACT and Muslim Charities Forum.

- RE:ACT coordinated the response from multiple partners, training a number of staff and volunteers from all partners in managing a testing site.

- Muslim Charities Forum assessed the volunteer training and mobilised local Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities.

The speed at which this network of voluntary and community organisations came together displays the value of the sector, and its ability to draw on the varying strengths within each organisation in its emergency response.

3.4 Community engagement

> **Interventions that stimulate and encourage opportunities for volunteering, building capability in the community and building cohesion, have got people used to looking after each other in a way they may not have thought about [in the past]. During Covid-19 that has reduced the dependency on emergency services, increased resilience in communities and has reinstated, I think, a more cohesive, capable community as a result.**

Jim Savege, Chief executive of Aberdeenshire Council

In announcing the development of a National Resilience Strategy, the UK government restated the importance of a whole-of-society approach to resilience, with an extensive role for communities themselves.[57] This is in line with a longstanding policy emphasis on the importance of community resilience[58], which features prominently in the most recent Resilience Standards issued by the Civil Contingencies Secretariat.[59] Similarly, many interviewees emphasised it was important for individuals and communities to be actively involved in emergency planning, response, recovery and learning in order to tailor the response to their needs, to build trust and to ensure that their skills and insights are used optimally. It can be difficult, however, to reach the most excluded and those who have come to believe community consultation is meaningless. There are no easy solutions. This section outlines three steps towards genuine community engagement: capacity building, empowered deliberation and building a two-way relationship with community groups.

Resolving issues in community engagement during the planning stage

Recent publications have reported that many communities feel side-lined in emergency planning. The 2021 Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee Report on Flooding reports that community involvement in flood planning is still often lacking:

> **Our current inquiry suggests that challenges in ensuring that local communities feel engaged in decisions about flood risk management cover all forms of flooding. The evidence we have received suggests that the issue is often not an absence of consultation, but a lack of confidence that consultations will make any difference. The National Flood Forum told us that existing plans reflect 'a patronising and paternalistic attitude that then results in consultation once plans have been decided'.[60]**

The committee report suggests that genuine community engagement can lead to greater buy-in, better use of local knowledge and potential cost saving.[61] To ensure community groups are able to fully engage in the planning and preparation process, it recommends that UK governments make funds available to the VCS to build capacity in other organisations.[62] In many places such efforts are already underway.

In Wales, for example, Ceredigion Association of Voluntary Organisations (CAVO) has started offering first aid and confidence building training to local people in Ceredigion to work towards the development of a community response plan. Interviewee Hazel Lloyd-Lubran, the Chief executive of CAVO, said:

> **It needs to come from the community first. The response plan will have parameters, but I think it has to be co-designed, doesn't it, so that there's that ownership.**

Similarly, the British Red Cross has worked with communities which have experienced flooding to help them draw up community resilience plans. The parish of Bourton-on-the-Water established a Local Flood Committee less than one month after the flooding in 2007.[63] They drew up a community response plan, including a register of local volunteers and resources. This included a local business with a snow plough, an equestrian centre that could look after stranded or injured animals, a trailer company that offered haulage and the faith leaders of three churches who offered pastoral and psychosocial help.[64]

Effective, human-centred community resilience plans require authorities, especially local authorities, to build in a role for residents in preparing for emergencies, too. As the British Red Cross has previously argued in its submission to the consultation on the Environment Strategy in Northern Ireland:[65]

Recommendation 12: With support and guidance from central government, local government, emergency planners, the VCS and community groups should work together to create community-owned plans and to feed into central government structures, such as consultations.

they want lots of flood defences and lots of sandbags. My simplistic view was that sandbags are good at making sure the water is clean before it goes into the building but it does not actually stop [the water] in that respect. So there's a false expectation sometimes in terms of what people think is going to help them or not." In his view, communities might overly focus on flood defence infrastructure, while underestimating the importance of taking their own steps to protect their homes, such as installing valves to prevent sewage water from rising up through toilets and sinks (adjustments for which local authorities often offer grants). This may result in a situation where the state expects communities to take individual responsibility while communities expect the state to step in through infrastructure investment.

The emergency response literature offers a potential solution. Where emergencies are a recurring feature, local leaders might choose to develop a mitigation and adaptation strategy with the local community, as was attempted in the Nocera Inferiore region of Italy, where landslides are common. Solutions were controversial,

> **Residents of the area know the flood risk best and want to be listened to when they tell their council and others that they are in imminent danger of flooding. They want to have more say in their flooding preparations; what their community needs and how it should respond (e.g. they asked to be able to put out road closed signs when their street is dangerously flooded). They want an emergency plan for their community and ideally would like to be central in creating this.**

Although almost all interviewees emphasised the importance of community ownership, actual experiences of engaging with communities are sometimes fraught. One local authority leader offered the example of public engagement on flood prevention: *"Some people's feeling is that*

especially when they involved building large concrete structures on private land.[66] In a participatory process, locals and stakeholders (such as land and business owners) were presented with three different options, based on scientific and expert knowledge.

These options were called 'mitigation packages'. For example, one package might include maximal safety precautions at considerable expense, whereas another package proposed less upfront investment and focused on remedying the effects of landslides after they occurred. The residents debated their options, and slowly found a shared decision.[67] Community involvement in this case was successful at breaking a year-long deadlock on the appropriate solution to the risk of landslides, yielding a path forward which was tailored to the needs of the community.[68] It is crucial that residents had the chance to choose their preferred package, as opposed to a more diffuse format in which residents could express concerns. By presenting a clear choice and giving residents the chance to express their preference, they created what political theorists call 'empowered participation'.[69]

Examples such as these may offer lessons to UK emergency response strategies. This might facilitate similar compromises – for example, a compromise in which the government agrees to fund further flood defences despite the cost, a local farmer agrees to use a plot of his land as excess water storage despite the effect on the land, and local residents agree to invest in flood adaptation measures for their homes. Two interviewees suggested flood-prone areas such as Cumbria should be looked at as examples of best practice.

> **Recommendation 13:** The Civil Contingencies Secretariat and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) should work with Local Flood Authorities to pilot schemes in community engagement and deliberative emergency planning in the UK.

Resolving issues in community engagement during recovery

It is equally important that the community is empowered to help shape the recovery process. One pertinent example is the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower fire. Many reports have found that in the aftermath, there was a lack of community involvement and personalised care. A report by the Equality and Human Rights Commission which followed a representative sample of 20 Grenfell survivors for a year found that *"[a] year on from the fire, none of the respondents had moved into longer-term accommodation. There was poor recognition of additional needs and reasonable adjustments when making housing decisions, particularly for disabled people, older people, women and Muslim families."* Many residents were rehoused in poor-quality temporary and emergency accommodation. Some felt they were being pressured to accept accommodation which did not fit their needs, in some cases far away from the area they called home.[70] The Grenfell Taskforce and Grenfell United have criticised the council for not sufficiently taking into account survivors' specific housing needs (e.g. housing with adjustments for disability).[71]

To strengthen community involvement, the Grenfell Recovery Taskforce has recommended that the council move away from its one-way grant funding relationship with charities and community groups working in the borough, and towards an approach of two-way communication and collaboration.[72] Rather than writing a proverbial cheque, this would require local authorities to actively solicit the input of the community groups they are funding. Survivors of the fire have also highlighted the crucial role of community representatives and called for these to be used more widely.[73]

> **Recommendation 14:** The Resilience Standards should be updated to reflect that as best practice, the relevant authorities should not only communicate to the public but also actively engage and co-produce solutions with the public, particularly in areas that are at a higher risk of repeated natural hazards.

3.5 Human-centred care

> I don't think some parts of the community appreciate the severity of the impacts of emergencies. [After the Manchester terror attack] we had people who chose to take their own lives as a result of being involved in the incident, people lost their jobs and houses because of an inability to go back to work or because of phobic reactions. So very, very profound impacts.

Dr. Alan Barrett of the Manchester Resilience Hub

Research by the British Red Cross, *Ready for anything*, has found that in the aftermath of an emergency, spanning across the response and recovery stages, people have a range of needs:

- **Immediate practical needs such as food, shelter and accommodation**

- **Psychosocial needs**

- **A need for information and communication**

- **A need for support and advocacy, for example in making insurance claims.**[74]

It has also recommended that the government consider introducing a statutory requirement for humanitarian assistance during emergencies, including food provision.[75]

Meeting people's holistic needs
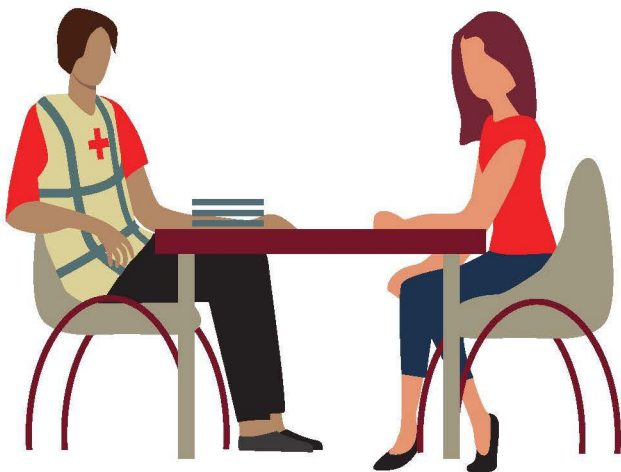
A 2019 British Red Cross review of English local resilience plans, set out in *People power in emergencies*, found that not all of these succeed at considering the varied needs of different groups in the aftermath of an emergency.

For example, none of the plans made mention of victims of intimate partner violence, who may be disproportionately affected in an emergency and overlooked in the response.[76] Some plans considered the need for personalised care, such as consideration for dietary requirements in food provision, but many did not.[77] Covid-19 has since exposed the importance of both.[78]

A 'lessons learned' review of the psychosocial support offered after the 7/7 bombings, conducted by the steering group that helped deliver this support, emphasises the importance of personalised support and practical help. The report finds "no two people reacted in the same way to what had happened to them and their needs were therefore different. [People were] more likely to need support and information than clinical treatment."[79] Similarly, the bereaved were a diverse group with diverse wishes and did not want to be treated as a bloc. The 'lessons learned' review further underlines the importance of practical support over a longer period, for example in explaining to (future) employers how PTSD might affect them in their job. The authors write:

> Don't underestimate the practical needs: Advice on finance and benefits, travel, employment, housing etc. may be the most urgent need for many of those involved in an incident, and their emotional recovery could be stalled until practical problems are addressed.[80]

Those affected by the 7/7 bombings often did not know what support they were entitled to. The 7th July Assistance Centre (7JAC) was set up by the government in the aftermath of the bombings to act as an easily visible and accessible 'one-stop shop' where different organisations, including many non-statutory organisations such as the British Red Cross, Victim Support and the Salvation Army, could provide information and support to victims and the bereaved. It acted as an emergency coordinator of sorts, liaising between the people affected by the bombing and various organisations so that people did not have to retell their story each time, which might have been a source of retraumatisation.

> **Recommendation 15:** The upcoming review of the Civil Contingencies Act should ensure there is a clear statutory responsibility for national government and Category 1 responders to meet the humanitarian needs of their communities. This includes the provision of information, emergency financial support, shelter, food and psychosocial support.

Cash assistance

At an individual level, there are also techniques and mechanisms available to give people greater say over what good care might look like. One of the most important is to pivot away from in-kind support and towards cash assistance.[81] Cash assistance is one of the most effective ways of ensuring that support is tailored to people's needs, with a wide academic and VCS literature testifying to its benefits.[82] This was echoed by some interviewees, one of whom said:

> It [cash assistance] is being done for the right reasons, which is because people know about what they want, or what they need. So it's getting away from the one size fits all… that's what makes it powerful.

The literature outlines exceptions where cash assistance is less helpful than in-kind assistance, particularly where supply is very limited or hard to reach. In such a situation, for example in a village cut off by floods, cash assistance might drive up prices in the local shop without increasing the supply of food.[83] In almost every other situation, cash assistance would be more efficient. It allows recipients to tailor their support to their own preferences, needs and dietary requirements, while also supporting the local economy.

In the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower fire, a system for providing cash assistance to survivors was set up with oversight from the charity commission. Writing for the Humanitarian Practice Network, one aid expert outlines how this worked:

> The system was managed jointly by the locally based Rugby Portobello Trust and the London Emergency Trust (LET), and set up following the Paris terror attack in December 2015 to provide a mechanism to channel funds to victims of attacks in the UK. More than £20 million has been distributed to bereaved families and to people injured or made homeless by the fire. The successful establishment of the cash distribution system mirrors a growing body of positive experience, evidence and learning from multiple emergencies around the world that attests to the appropriateness of cash assistance.[84] [85]

There are, however, a number of practical and policy-related issues in distributing cash in emergencies. In particular, the British Red Cross has flagged the need to assure people that any state benefits they are receiving would not be put at risk by receiving cash assistance.[86] [87]

Recommendation 16: National and local governments, as well as the voluntary and community sector, should be supported to adopt a 'cash first' approach in emergencies.

Recommendation 17: The Civil Contingencies Secretariat should work with the Department for Work and Pensions to provide a guarantee that benefits eligibility will not be affected due to cash support from charities or community groups after an emergency.
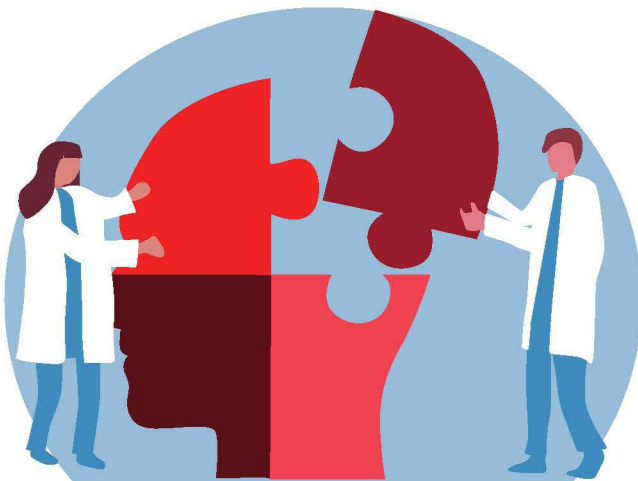
Psychosocial support

Although people often show astounding levels of resilience after emergencies, there tends to be a significant minority with a need for longer-term support. The Scottish guidance on psychosocial support recommends a stepped model[88], which acknowledges that the majority of those affected do not require or desire specialist care[89], but goes on to outline a number of benchmarks at various points in time:

> **...in the first week, mental health professionals should provide specialist advice to those managing the recovery at every level and responding agencies should gather information and contact details to offer follow-up support as needed; during the first month emergency response staff should be monitored for trauma and burnout; during the first three months, evidence-based treatment should be made available to all who suffer from PTSD following the emergency.**

In delivering psychosocial support, it recommends working with community leaders, including faith leaders, from the very start to identify community need and enable tailored care and support.

Because of their human focus, charities and community groups are often able to provide emotional support to those who do not require or desire specialist care (those with 'sub-clinical need', in the medical jargon). Others, however, will require clinical support and supervision. Current government guidance suggests that teams working with affected communities should try to integrate people into existing, permanent structures (e.g. NHS-provided counselling) as soon as is feasible.

However, not every local authority has the resources or capacity to deal with these events and continued psychosocial support might not be possible due to the lack of capacity in some areas. This is clearly a bottleneck in delivering a human-centred emergency response.

Similar themes emerge from the official review of the response to the Manchester Arena attack. The Kerslake report highlights that after the attack, many concert goers "did not know who they could turn to for support."[90] This issue seems to have been especially pertinent for the children affected, as the Kerslake report heard that mental health support for children was particularly difficult to access and that many people did not have the necessary information and guidance to access these services. Through the Greater Manchester Resilience Hub, a collaboration between four NHS mental health trusts in Greater Manchester, people were often referred to local counselling services, where they received highly divergent levels of support. Victims' testimonies included in the report show very different experiences with counselling, some of which were truly sub-par, highlighting the different levels of provision in each local authority area.

Several of the practitioners interviewed for this research argued that the mental health impact of emergencies requires greater attention and mitigation. One government interviewee said: "You hear this argument that people almost never die from flooding in the UK. But people absolutely die from the physical health effects, the mental health effects, the financial problems and suicide." This supports an existing British Red Cross recommendation, developed in response to the 2017 UK emergencies, calling for people's mental and physical health to have parity in emergency response, and for psychosocial support to be seen as an integral part of emergency response and recovery.[91]

At present, mental health trusts are Category 2 responders, which limits their duties, but it should be considered best practice to have mental health experts around the table of every Recovery Coordination Group. The Covid-19 pandemic has only further highlighted the mental health impact of emergencies, with many organisations signalling unmet mental health needs among both those directly affected as well as responders.[92]

Recommendation 18: The Civil Contingencies Secretariat should update the Resilience Standards to outline a stronger role for mental health (particularly in the form of assessments and interventions) and other forms of psychosocial support, so that they are seen as an integral part of emergency response and recovery. This should include guidelines for training emergency responders in trauma-informed approaches and psychological first aid.

Recommendation 19: Recovery Coordinating Groups should invite mental health trusts and representatives from organisations with expertise in mental health to the table at the start of the recovery phase.

Case study: Manchester Arena attack

On May 22nd 2017, as a pop concert was coming to an end, a suicide bomber detonated an explosive device in the foyer of the Manchester Arena, killing 22 people and injuring many more. In the following weeks and months, many of the survivors and the bereaved, as well as a number of health workers and police officers, required practical help and psychosocial support.

The morning after the attack, the local military veterans' service was contacted by veterans who were now police officers and who had previously received therapy related to their time in the armed forces. One of the officers had been assigned to work on the body identification unit. It was initially unclear what psychological support, if any, would be available to those working in this extremely distressing environment. Nor was it initially clear whether there would be funding available to help survivors and the bereaved access psychosocial support where needed. Academics have argued that in future, agreements on funding for mental health support should be pre-agreed to ensure plans get off to a rapid start.[93]

After one of Greater Manchester's Clinical Commissioning Groups agreed to financially underwrite the first year of expenditure in the hopes of eventually securing national funding, the Greater Manchester Resilience Hub was set up by four Greater Manchester mental health trusts to provide operational outreach and assessment triage. The hub actively reached out to those who had attended the concert and provided a central point for mental health advice and support. It also offered top-up training for trauma-focused therapists. In its work on mental health, the Resilience Hub had to navigate existing health structures, such as the split between children's and adult services. The concert had been attended by children as well as their parents and grandparents, and meeting each of their needs effectively required an all-age approach.
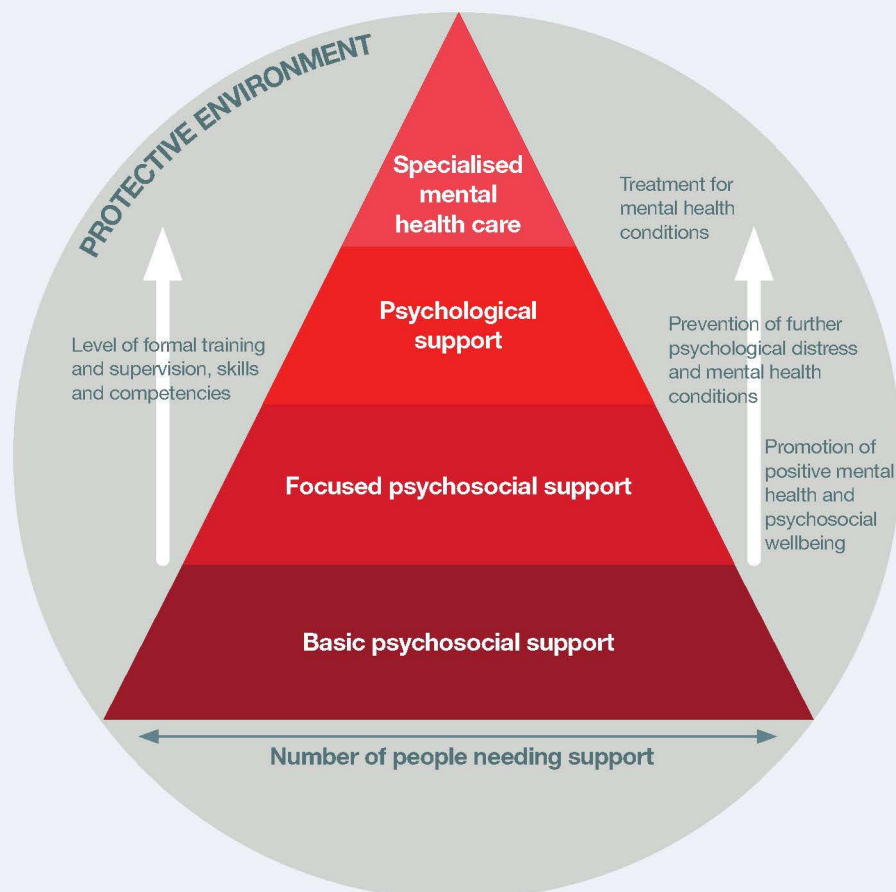
Reflecting on the process, Dr. Alan Barrett of the Manchester Resilience Hub emphasises that risks, including risk to life, do not disappear when the emergency is over. While survivors tend to show remarkable resilience, a significant minority will require further psychological support. "[One year after the incident], we had over 200 adults who expressed thoughts of suicide at least half the days of the week and half of them had not received or sought professional help [since the attack]. Many people who were struggling felt undeserving because they did not know someone who died and had not been injured." This is echoed in the academic literature, with experts emphasising that active outreach is essential.[94]

Emergency plans may need to be updated to reflect the importance of outreach to assure people that they are eligible for and deserving of such support. Emergency plans should also reflect the importance of mental health more broadly. "It still feels as though mental health is an add-on", Dr Barrett said. "It still feels tokenistic."

The Red Cross approach to addressing mental health and psychosocial needs during emergencies[95]

The pyramid model below represents the framework of mental health and psychosocial support services that are required to address the needs of individuals, families and communities in all contexts. This has been developed by the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (the 'Movement').

The framework stresses that key to organising mental health and psychosocial support is to develop a layered system of complementary support that meets the needs of different groups.

PROTECTIVE ENVIRONMENT

Specialised mental health care

Treatment for mental health conditions

Psychological support

Level of formal training and supervision, skills and competencies

Prevention of further psychological distress and mental health conditions

Focused psychosocial support

Promotion of positive mental health and psychosocial wellbeing

Basic psychosocial support

Number of people needing support

Basic psychosocial support – the first layer of the pyramid – promotes positive mental health and psychosocial wellbeing, resilience, social interaction and social cohesion activities within communities. Activities in this layer are often integrated into health, protection and education sectors and should be accessible to 100% of the affected population, where possible. Examples of activities include psychological first aid (PFA) and recreational activities. Basic psychosocial support can be provided by trained Red Cross and Red Crescent staff and volunteers and/or trained community members.

Focused psychosocial support – the second layer – includes promotion of positive mental health and psychosocial wellbeing and prevention activities, with a specific focus on groups, families and individuals at risk. Examples of activities include peer support and group work. Focused psychosocial support can be provided by trained and supervised Red Cross and Red Crescent staff and volunteers and/or trained community members.

Psychological support – the third layer of the pyramid – includes prevention and treatment activities for individuals and families who present with more complicated psychological distress and for people at risk of developing mental health conditions. Examples of activities include basic psychological interventions, such as counselling or psychotherapy, which are usually provided in health-care facilities with accompanying outreach work or in community facilities, where this is culturally acceptable.

Specialised mental health care – the top layer of the pyramid – includes specialised clinical care and treatment for individuals with chronic mental health conditions and for persons suffering such severe distress and over such a period of time that they have difficulty coping in their daily lives. Examples of activities include treatment centres for survivors of torture and alternative approaches to drug therapy. Services are provided within State health-care and social welfare systems and in detention facilities.

3.6 Active charities and volunteers

> Local people stood up and put things in place with their neighbours and with their friend[s] ... there was lots of spontaneous community movement and ... we had a huge citizens mobilisation. And I think we've all learnt a lot from that.

Marie Hayes, British Red Cross

Mobilisation and service provision

Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, charities, mutual aid groups and community groups have played a vital role in their communities. Volunteers fulfilled crucial functions such as delivering food and medicine to those who were shielding, checking in on people in vulnerable situations and assisting with the vaccine rollout. Every civil servant and government representative interviewed for this project spoke with awe about the tremendous mobilisation of community and voluntary action during the pandemic, as volunteers provided countless hours of their time.

The existing guidance acknowledges the importance of such initiatives. The non-statutory guidance accompanying the CCA outlines some of the many roles the VCS can play, including staffing rest centres and humanitarian assistance centres; seeing to the practical needs of those affected; providing manpower for medical operations, including first aid posts; coordinating volunteers; mounting search and rescue operations; and providing social and psychological aftercare to those affected.[96] However, for the most part, the guidance does not acknowledge the strategic role the VCS can undertake.

Strategic insights and advice

While governments in the UK are keen to make use of the VCS, this has not always been accompanied by appropriate structures to guide and support them. More could be done to integrate the efforts of the VCS into the emergency response structure, especially regarding planning and decision-making, where their value is often underestimated. All too often, the VCS's unique ability to tap into the resources and assets within a community, understand community need and vulnerabilities, feed in insights from those most at risk during emergencies, as well as provide a human touch, is overlooked. Giving evidence in the House of Lords, Adrian Clee of the Salvation Army said:

> Genuine engagement with the voluntary sector at LRF level is still extremely sporadic across the country. Very often, when a major emergency occurs, the vital role that the voluntary sector can play in welfare and humanitarian support is still very much an afterthought rather than part of well laid-down exercise plans. For instance, these days very few LRFs have a voluntary sector subgroup, so those genuine partnerships, relationships and understanding of the breadth of what the voluntary sector can offer have waned in certain areas.[97]

This was echoed in interviews with voluntary sector leaders, some of whom had little to no contact with their Local Resilience Forum/ Partnership – a sign that the emergency response system is not working optimally. Under the CCA, statutory responders must 'have regard to' other organisations, including the VCS. For this to be meaningful, the Resilience Standards must include detailed guidance on how to engage with the VCS as a matter of good practice. When LRFs are reviewed, for example in peer review processes, they should be assessed against clear standards of VCS involvement. LRFs may also wish to make use of resources such as the Voluntary and community sector checklist for local resilience forums, developed by the British Red Cross.[98]

Others have questioned whether the CCA wording, as well as wording used in other official guidance such as the Guidance on Emergency Preparedness and the Guidance on Emergency Response and Recovery, are strong enough to compel collaboration with the VCS in practice. The language used suggests those following the guidance should 'have regard to' the VCS, and 'be aware of' the services they can offer. While the VCS is too broad a sector and lacks the statutory footing to act as a category responder, the duty on LRFs and their devolved equivalents to collaborate with VCS organisations throughout all stages of the resilience cycle could be strengthened.

Recommendation 20: The upcoming review of the Civil Contingencies Act should strengthen the duty on LRFs to collaborate with the VCS and the statutory guidance to the Civil Contingencies Act should be amended to make it mandatory to have representation of the VCS at all levels of LRFs and LRPs. This should include having a VCS subgroup and for the VCS to be represented by a subgroup chair or member at Strategic and Tactical Level meetings.

Recommendation 21: As part of the National Resilience Strategy development and CCA review, the Civil Contingencies Secretariat should work with VCS organisations to update the Resilience Standards to include more clear and precise guidelines on how LRFs and LRPs might involve the VCS in planning, response, recovery and learning.

Recommendation 22: When LRFs and LRPs are assessed, for example in peer review processes, this should include an assessment of their procedures for involving the VCS.

Spontaneous volunteers

In an emergency, some volunteers will be highly trained and prepared, while others are spontaneous responders. Seamus MacAleavy of the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA), described the importance of tapping into their skills and resources:

> **Many of the people who spring into action after an emergency are your spontaneous responders. They are not like the blue lights, planned and trained and prepared. These people respond spontaneously when their community needs help. The interesting thing is, within structures of community-based organisations you often have many assets and skills. The local football club may well have lots of builders who have access to equipment and who can help.**

As the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic started to be felt in early 2020, many local football clubs in Northern Ireland did spring into action, providing volunteers and testing locations, which testifies to the power of community groups. Seamus MacAleavy argues peacetime work is required to ensure community groups are ready when an emergency strikes:

> **You couldn't prepare these voluntary and community organisations in the same ways you can prepare the blue light organisations, whose job it is, but you could gather the communications information [such as phone numbers and email addresses] that might be needed when an emergency occurs.**

The Resilience Standards already recommend such an approach, but these efforts deserve to be high on the priority list. In peacetime, LRFs, devolved equivalents and the VCS should develop plans to leverage spontaneous volunteers, for example by outlining in advance which roles could be fulfilled by spontaneous volunteers, training volunteer coordinators, reviewing existing legislation, addressing risk and liability, preparing communication plans and developing a system for registering potential volunteers' contact details. If volunteers are not effectively matched with initiatives in need of volunteers, they might become disappointed and give up on volunteering altogether – a worry which was expressed by a number of VCS interviewees. Best practice from other countries, such as Australia, might be helpful in developing effective strategies to make the most of volunteers' energy and initiative, as the Australian government has developed detailed guidance on how to create a productive setup for spontaneous volunteers, in line with the above.[99] Please see Appendix B for an overview of the Australian Government's Spontaneous Volunteer Strategy goals.

> **Recommendation 23:** LRFs and LRPs should work with the VCS to develop procedures for harnessing the power of spontaneous volunteers, drawing on the Australian example.

Harnessing the value of the voluntary and community sector in the long-term

A reserve of volunteers can provide a crucial layer of care and support and form a key part of community resilience.[100] There was a sense, however, from many charity representatives that more could be done to harness the power of the sector. In other words, governments should not just rely on the VCS to drum up volunteers, but also to help them in developing policy and more generally feed grassroots voices upward. Marie Hayes of the Red Cross in Scotland said:

> **I think in the past we were always welcomed as the voluntary sector, and it was a good thing, but to some extent there may have been a bit of a pigeonholing of the expectations of what the voluntary sector can do. And I think in Scotland, in the past it was still limited around that mobilisation to a narrow range of tasks [of volunteers]. It has developed during the course of the pandemic, with the third sector and volunteers being much more integral across the response and planning, and it will be important to build on this.**

During the pandemic, many VCS groups were invited to the table at various levels of government, reflecting a welcome shift away from any pigeonholing. These resulted in well-established working relationships which should be harnessed and developed further.

Furthermore, during the Covid-19 pandemic, the VCS Emergencies Partnership (VCSEP) has been a great asset in fostering collaboration between different not-for-profit groups, and ensuring the sector's voice and insights have been heard across government (central and local). It has also generated insights on unmet need through a regular survey of voluntary and community organisations and amplified the voices of those affected. The VCSEP, which now consists of over 300 registered charities as well as industry, health and government representatives, was set up following the emergencies of 2017 to foster a more coordinated response among the VCS.

While the VCSEP had cut its teeth in responding to emergencies such as the Whaley Bridge dam collapse, the pandemic was a major test for this relatively new partnership.

When one of the partners, the food charity FareShare, experienced a fivefold increase in demand in the Southwest of England they turned to the VCSEP, which helped to bring in additional support from other organisations, including RE:ACT and the British Red Cross. Together, they delivered more than 200,000 meals and 16 tonnes of food to those in need.[101] This is a good example of just how much a joined-up and empowered VCS can achieve in emergencies.

Recommendation 24: Local and national government should seek to establish two-way relationships with the voluntary and community sector, enlisting their help not just when volunteers are needed, but also enabling them to feed information and insight to and from the grassroots in emergency planning, response, recovery and learning. This is key to ensuring all communities' needs are addressed in real-time in changing situations and dynamics.

3.7 Continuously learning lessons and future-proofing

> [Good preparedness] is not about developing more plans, it's about how you develop resilient communities and resilient agencies that are well used to working with each other and have trust and confidence in how each other [works].

Jim Savege, Chief executive of Aberdeenshire Council

In a report compiled for the Civil Contingencies Secretariat into the learning process after emergencies, the Emergency Planning Society emphasises that organisations and countries struggle to learn lessons from past emergencies.[102] According to the report, we "continually fail to convert 'lessons identified' from emergency response into embedded 'lessons learned.'" The difficulty of learning lessons from past emergencies is underlined by a number of repeated problems across the foot and mouth crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic. In a recent report, the Royal Society lists a number of recommendations made after foot and mouth which are relevant to the novel coronavirus outbreak. Such recommendations include: make worst-case contingency plans, improve early-warning systems and take every precaution to prevent outbreaks from becoming epidemics, "including [the] need to consider national lockdown when [the] first case [is] detected and until [the] extent of [the] spread [is] clear."[103]

Clear leadership and accountability structures can facilitate learning from emergencies. The recommendations to create a Civil Contingencies Advisory Group in Whitehall and a Civil Contingencies Select Committee in Parliament[104], which were outlined in Section 3.1, could drive the process of reflecting on and drawing on learnings from recent emergencies. In doing so, the future Civil Contingencies Select Committee should recognise the important role of the VCS in identifying learnings and providing a platform for voices from the community. **A review of select committee reports and inquiries into emergency response reveals the crucial importance of the voluntary sector in identifying learnings and translating lessons from the community level to national policy and guidance.**

When affected groups offer evidence in parliamentary hearings, it is typically through voluntary sector organisations – this is an important factor in learning from emergencies, which helps to place those affected at the heart of policy-making.

The official guidance for Local Resilience Forums (LRFs) specifies that LRF plans should include a debrief process. The guidance mentions that this "should be seen as an opportunity for all organisations involved (both statutory and voluntary) to share and understand what went well during the response and recovery phases, and also to identify areas for development that can be fed back into the LRF planning process."[105] It should be considered best practice to have the relevant charities and community groups fully involved in the debrief. Peer review processes should include scrutiny of the debrief process.

Recommendation 25: The Civil Contingencies Secretariat should update the CCA guidance to build in a role for feedback from a broader group of stakeholders and to make the integral role of the voluntary and community sector in identifying and implementing learnings more explicit.

Recommendation 26: If instituted, a Civil Contingencies Select Committee should work with the voluntary and community sector to identify learnings from emergencies and to amplify the voices of those affected.

Evolving threats, including climate change

> **[In light of increasing extreme weather events] do we need to reassess what the impacts, what the threats are going to be on the UK and the EU? Do we need to therefore check, plan and prepare for something different than we currently are?**
>
> **Paul Netherton, National police resilience lead**

In addition to learning lessons from the past, UK emergency response structures must be prepared for increasing risks. Climate change and extreme weather are among the most significant of these. At present, 1.9 million people across the UK live in areas marked by significant flood risk – a number which could double as early as the 2050s.[106] Further, we are already seeing the impact of heatwaves on people in the UK.[107] The summer of 2020 saw 2,556 excess deaths in England alone, and by 2050 heatwaves are projected to double in frequency and become more intense, resulting in three times more excess deaths caused by hot weather annually.[108] Scientific estimates of risk, such as those developed by the Natural Hazards Partnership, are supposed to be translated into local responses through the National Risk Register compiled by the Civil Contingencies Secretariat. The Risk Register could and should play a leading role in helping local emergency response partnerships anticipate, prepare for and build resilience to climate risks and impacts. As it stands, the risk register discusses the risk of severe weather and acknowledges the role of climate change in this. It should, however, offer detailed insight into risk at the regional and local level, so that resilience forums can more easily adapt these into community risk registers.

Recommendation 27: The Civil Contingencies Secretariat should work with the Environment Agency, the Natural Hazards Partnership and climate scientists to review and update the National Risk Register to fully encompass existing and future climate risks at the local level.

Some LRFs have been leading the way on climate change preparedness. The Cornwall, Devon and Isles of Scilly LRF in particular has been collaborating with Exeter University and the Met Office. Paul Netherton, Police lead for resilience and member of the Cornwall, Devon and Isles of Scilly LRF said:

> **We will see drought, we will see heatwaves, we will see, as in Paris last year, 40°C in the summer. We will see temperature change and sea level rise. We will see floods in winter, and the big storms that should come every 50 years will start happening every year. The need for resilience becomes greater and greater. So what should LRFs do in response? We are working with the Environment Agency and southwest LRFs to figure that out.**

The most concrete stream of work thus far is a Climate Risk Register, which is currently in production for the Cornwall, Devon and Isles of Scilly LRF area. The climate risk register takes all the climate-associated risks from the community risk register, such as coastal flooding and heatwaves, and assesses them on a 10-to-15-year basis to fill gaps in preparedness when it comes to climate change.[109]

These efforts form part of the wider Devon Carbon Emergency Response group, formed in 2019 with the mission of creating a net-zero carbon Devon. Within this group sits the Climate Impacts Group, whose mission is to "prepare communities for the necessary adaptations to infrastructure, services and behaviours that will be required to respond to a warmer world [and] improve the resilience of the natural environment against the effects of climate change." The Met office is one of the participants, producing a reasonable worst-case scenario of the climate change effects in the LRF area. Another participant, the University of Exeter, was tasked with assembling a report on the wider destabilising effects of climate change. Academics from the University of Exeter will also lead on preparations for a Devon-based citizens' assembly on climate change.

Recommendation 28: To support the most climate vulnerable communities LRFs should be funded and supported to work with climate scientists and local communities that are most impacted, to develop climate risk resilience, response and recovery strategies.

4. <u>Conclusion</u>

People must be at the heart of the emergency response process. This requires changes in policy and practice, described by Bruce Mann, the former head of the Civil Contingencies Secretariat, as a threefold shift. The first shift is in the scope of the response: previous emergencies, especially the 7/7 bombings, taught us that emergency response requires caring for a wider group of people, such as worried family and friends. Not all deaths from emergencies happen immediately and the fallout from civil contingencies affects a wide community. The second shift concerns the timescale of the response and recovery: rebuilding after an emergency such as flooding takes months and support timelines should be lengthened accordingly. Whether emergencies are immediate and local, such as a localised flood, or national and protracted, such as a pandemic, the system needs to be able to manage not just the immediate fallout but also the long-term requirements. The third shift is the shift towards a more tailored, human-centred response. In other words, UK emergency response practitioners are set the difficult task of caring for a wider group of people, for a longer period of time, in a more differentiated manner.

Getting to this point will require a great deal of work and investment, along the seven strands outlined in this report:
(1) leadership and accountability, (2) planning, (3) collaboration across silos and organisational boundaries, (4) community engagement, (5) human-centred care, (6) active charities and volunteers and (7) continuously learning lessons and future-proofing.

The evidence presented in this report suggests that the UK's emergency response structures and legislation are in need of updating. In 2001, the government set out to update and modernise emergency response frameworks – the evidence suggests that now, two decades on, a further update is required to raise the country's preparedness for the future emergencies we will no doubt face.

5. Policy recommendations

Leadership and accountability

1. The UK government should move a motion in Parliament to establish a Civil Contingencies Select Committee.[27]

2. The UK government should establish a Civil Contingencies Advisory Group, comprised of experts from academia and practice, including the VCS. This Advisory Group should build on the work of the National Preparedness Commission, which is already holistically considering the UK's resilience and preparedness.

3. The UK government should create the role of an Emergencies Minister within Government. This role should sit within the Cabinet Office, be a Cabinet level post, and provide cross-government coordination, leadership and accountability before, during and after an emergency.

4. The UK government should establish effective early dialogue and warning systems for local emergency response partners, including local authorities, health bodies, the voluntary and community sector – and specifically the Voluntary and Community Sector Emergencies Partnership (VCSEP) – in areas that are about to be affected by new policies, to better enable an effective and well-planned human-centred response.

5. The UK government should review the Bellwin scheme's scope, and trial a scheme for pre-agreeing to financial support for recovery from specific emergencies such as floods and terror attacks. The level of pre-agreed support should be regularly reviewed to ensure it is adequate for dealing with the long-term aftereffects of emergencies.

Planning

6. UK and devolved government departments should fund and support effective scenario-based training exercises engaging all relevant sectors several times a year. Government Liaison Officers should register how frequently each resilience forum exercises. Exercises should involve senior as well as junior personnel from the relevant agencies, and include the VCS as well as statutory organisations.

7. The UK government should create a Resilience Fund for LRFs to invest in emergency preparedness. This should focus on working within and across sectors to plan, identify need, and build relationships as well as invest in parts of their local emergency preparation and response systems, which have seen a decline in funding in recent years, from blue light services and local government to VCS organisations.

8. The government should continue providing a government liaison officer for each LRF beyond the pandemic.

9. UK and devolved governments should encourage and support peer review among LRFs, LRPs and EPGs (the Scottish and Northern Irish equivalents of LRFs), based on the Resilience Standards. The peer review process should actively involve the group's VCS representatives.

10. In addition to regularly assessing the risk of an emergency occurring, as part of their duty to assess risk under the CCA, LRFs should be explicitly required to identify the specific needs and vulnerabilities of their community in particular emergencies, and their plans should address these needs accordingly.

Collaboration across silos and organisational boundaries

11. The Civil Contingencies Secretariat and DCMS should liaise with the Information Commissioner's Office to provide clearer guidelines on how to manage privacy and confidentiality when sharing data in the event of an emergency. This should allow data sharing with all emergency response partners, including the VCS. These guidelines should be clear and simple, and tested as part of practice exercises. They should cover not just emergency response but also planning and recovery.

Community engagement

12. With support and guidance from central government, local government, emergency planners, the VCS and community groups should work together to create community-owned plans and to feed into central government structures, such as consultations.

13. The Civil Contingencies Secretariat and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) should work with Local Flood Authorities to pilot schemes in community engagement and deliberative emergency planning in the UK.

14. The Resilience Standards should be updated to reflect that as best practice, the relevant authorities should not only communicate to the public but also actively engage and co-produce solutions with the public, particularly in areas that are at a higher risk of repeated natural hazards.

Human-centred care

15. The upcoming review of the Civil Contingencies Act should ensure there is a clear statutory responsibility for national government and Category 1 responders to meet the humanitarian needs of their communities. This includes the provision of information, emergency financial support, shelter, food and psychosocial support.

16. National and local governments, as well as the voluntary and community sector, should be supported to adopt a 'cash first' approach in emergencies.

17. The Civil Contingencies Secretariat should work with the Department for Work and Pensions to provide a guarantee that benefits eligibility will not be affected due to cash support from charities or community groups after an emergency.

18. The Civil Contingencies Secretariat should update the Resilience Standards to outline a stronger role for mental health (particularly in the form of assessments and interventions) and other forms of psychosocial support, so that they are seen as an integral part of emergency response and recovery. This should include guidelines for training emergency responders in trauma-informed approaches and psychological first aid.

19. Recovery Coordinating Groups should invite mental health trusts and representatives from organisations with expertise in mental health to the table at the start of the recovery phase.

Active charities and volunteers

20. The upcoming review of the Civil Contingencies Act should strengthen the duty on LRFs to collaborate with the VCS and the statutory guidance to the Civil Contingencies Act should be amended to make it mandatory to have representation of the VCS at all levels of LRFs and LRPs. This should include having a VCS subgroup and for the VCS to be represented by a subgroup chair or member at Strategic and Tactical Level meetings.

21. As part of the National Resilience Strategy development and CCA review, the Civil Contingencies Secretariat should work with VCS organisations to update the Resilience Standards to include more clear and precise guidelines on how LRFs and LRPs might involve the VCS in planning, response, recovery and learning.

22. When LRFs and LRPs are assessed, for example in peer review processes, this should include an assessment of their procedures for involving the VCS.

23. LRFs and LRPs should work with the VCS to develop procedures for harnessing the power of spontaneous volunteers, drawing on the Australian example.

24. Local and national government should seek to establish two-way relationships with the voluntary and community sector, enlisting their help not just when volunteers are needed, but also enabling them to feed information and insight to and from the grassroots in emergency planning, response, recovery and learning. This is key to ensuring all communities' needs are addressed in real-time in changing situations and dynamics.

Continuously learning lessons and future-proofing

25. The Civil Contingencies Secretariat should update the CCA guidance to build in a role for feedback from a broader group of stakeholders and to make the integral role of the voluntary and community sector in identifying and implementing learnings more explicit.

26. If instituted, a Civil Contingencies Select Committee should work with the voluntary and community sector to identify learnings from emergencies and to amplify the voices of those affected.

27. The Civil Contingencies Secretariat should work with the Environment Agency, the Natural Hazards Partnership and climate scientists to review and update the National Risk Register to fully encompass existing and future climate risks at the local level.

28. To support the most climate vulnerable communities LRFs should be funded and supported to work with climate scientists and local communities that are most impacted, to develop climate risk resilience, response and recovery strategies.

6. <u>**Appendices**</u>

Appendix A:
Literature review methodology

This research commenced with a literature review covering the academic and grey literature on UK civil contingencies. A comprehensive list was created of relevant publications from think tanks, oversight bodies and the VCS where these had commented either on the Civil Contingencies Act, on the LRF or RRP structure or on specific emergencies (see below).

Academic literature was identified through Google Scholar, by searching for key terms such as 'emergency response', 'civil contingencies', 'resilience forum', 'resilience partnership' and 'Civil Contingencies Act', on their own and combined with terms such as 'human-centred', 'person-centred', 'evaluation' and 'policy'. Those which either assessed the UK civil contingencies approach or sought to identify lessons by comparisons of different countries were included.

Where further detail was necessary, such as on the effectiveness of cash assistance, these questions were the basis of subsequent searches, including 'cash assistance evaluation' 'cash assistance effectiveness', 'cash assistance review' and 'cash assistance meta-review' and 'cash assistance systematic review'.

A further strand of literature included findings from all select committees which had reported on civil contingencies over the past decade. Reviews of a small number of emergencies were also taken into account. These emergencies were: the Grenfell tower fire, the Manchester Arena attack and the 2017 London terror attack. In addition, reviews of the 7/7 bombings and the Pitt Review were also taken into account, as these were identified as having had a particularly pronounced effect on policy.

Appendix B:
Overview of the Australian Government's Spontaneous Volunteer Strategy goals, objectives, principles and suggested actions, taken from the Spontaneous Volunteer Strategy.[110]

Goal: Coordination of volunteer effort in the immediate post disaster stage

Objectives:	Principles:	Summary of suggested actions:
Empowered individuals and communities	1. People affected are the first priority 2. Spontaneous volunteering aids recovery and resilience 3. Jurisdictions will take considered policy positions about engaging spontaneous volunteers	• Consider the management of spontaneous volunteers in recovery plans and budgets • Identify suitable post-disaster activities in advance • Involve existing community groups in pre-event recovery planning and exercising • Review existing legislation that addresses risk and liability for spontaneous volunteers
Efficient and effective coordination of spontaneous volunteers	4. Processes will need to engage volunteers and support agencies 5. Standard volunteer management processes apply in emergencies 6. Spontaneous volunteering is included in existing recovery arrangements	• Develop scalable processes that reflect the motivations of spontaneous volunteers • Provide information about how the needs of people affected by the disaster are being met • Register spontaneous volunteers and monitor their safety and wellbeing • Integrate arrangements for spontaneous volunteers into existing emergency management plans
Satisfied volunteers who may continue to volunteer in the emergency management sector	7. Everyone has a right to help and be valued 8. The time when help is offered may not coincide with the need for volunteers 9. Effective, timely and consistent communication is essential	• Recognise the inevitable nature of spontaneous volunteering • Provide training and guidelines for individuals and emergent groups who may spontaneously volunteer • Promote future volunteering opportunities and ensure effective follow-up and referral • Develop communication plans and key messages including the use of social media in recovery

Endnotes

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About the British Red Cross

For over 150 years, the British Red Cross has helped people in crisis, whoever and wherever they are. We are part of a global voluntary network, responding to conflicts, natural disasters and individual emergencies. We enable people in the UK and abroad to prepare for and withstand emergencies in their own communities. And when the crisis is over, we help them recover and move on with their lives.
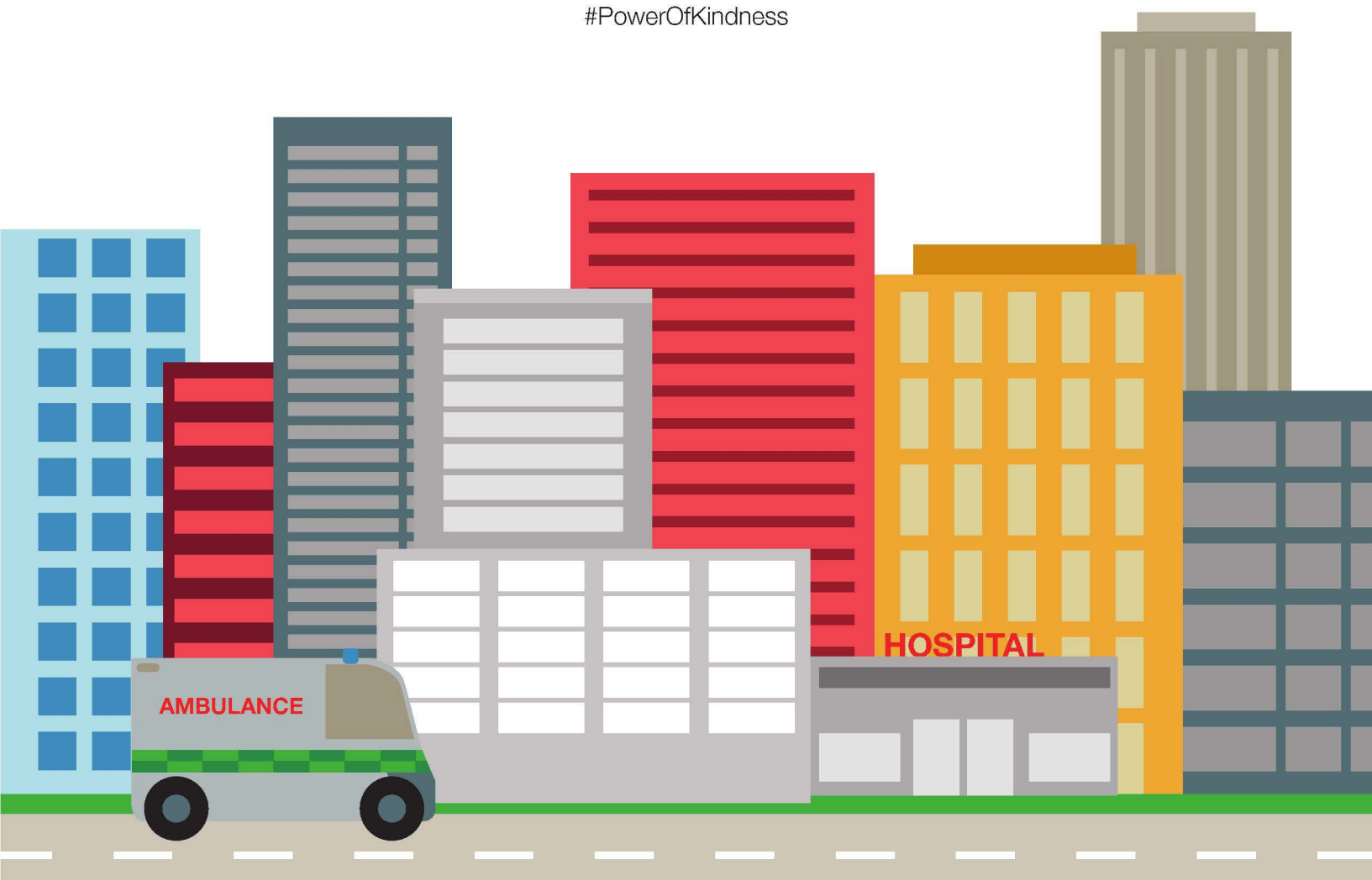
The British Red Cross has more than 19,600 volunteers in the UK and nearly 3,900 staff. We are part of the world's largest humanitarian network, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, which has 14 million volunteers across 192 countries. We are the UK's National Red Cross Society and an auxiliary to the UK public authorities in the humanitarian field. We are the UK's largest voluntary and community sector emergency response organisation, and work closely with our partners, including as co-chair of the Voluntary and Community Sector Emergencies Partnership (VCSEP).

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