



# People power in emergencies

An assessment of voluntary and  
community sector engagement  
and human-centred approaches  
to emergency planning

November 2019

Policy, Research and Advocacy







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# Foreword

When disasters strike, whether floods, fires or terror attacks, tried and tested systems kick in. For that day when action is needed, local authorities, emergency services and the voluntary sector have planned for the worst all year round, reviewing and refining their processes and chains of command.

Even the slickest emergency procedures cannot always address the individual and sometimes unpredictable needs of people needing help, though. However much you plan or rehearse, every emergency is different, and the impact on each person affected is specific to them.

Ultimately, individuals and communities know best what their needs are. The voluntary sector has an abundance of skills, knowledge and insights to communicate, provide and advocate. Not only do we complement statutory agencies and help them to tailor their response better, we increase their capacity to respond overall.

From swiftly sharing information on the ground to advising on the donations needed, and from acting as advocates, carers and interpreters to offering people emotional support, we do not just act – we also empower. We involve individuals and communities in shaping a response that is right for them.

This report highlights how much local resilience forums in England factor in the skills and capacities of the voluntary and community sector when they plan for and respond to emergencies. It assesses how plans meet the needs of individuals and communities caught up in an emergency, and reveals that, for both, the picture is variable.

It goes on to make recommendations about how voluntary and statutory bodies can work much better together, and how preparing for, responding to and recovering from emergencies can best be informed by communities. It outlines the actions we need to take as a sector to ensure people get the best and most appropriate response.

We urge everyone with the power to influence how the UK responds to emergencies to work with us and to act on this report's recommendations. Together, our role is to be as ready as we possibly can be to support all people well, whatever the next disaster or emergency brings.

Repairing dams or putting out fires is not our role. It is about highlighting local challenges, sensitivities and opportunities and helping people to survive and recover better. That is what we bring.

## **Mike Adamson**

Chief Executive Officer (CEO), British Red Cross, and Chair, Voluntary and Community Sector Emergencies Partnership

## **Jane Ide**

CEO, National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA), and Deputy Chair, Voluntary and Community Sector Emergencies Partnership



## What is a human-centred approach to emergency response?

This report refers throughout to a human-centred approach to emergency response. What is meant by this is similar to the concept of personalised care in health and social care services.

At times of crisis, the people involved:

- will have the best idea of the support they need most
- have distinct psychological, emotional and social needs, as well as immediate practical needs (such as for shelter and food)
- may need support in their longer-term recovery and not just in the immediate aftermath of a crisis.

A human-centred approach to crisis response means that organisations and systems empower people to access personalised support at times of crisis, provide support that addresses both practical and psychosocial needs equally (see page 13), and continue to offer longer-term support as people recover, and rebuild their lives.

Supported by its research and operational expertise, the British Red Cross firmly believe that the involvement of people and communities in every stage of crisis planning, response and recovery is essential to ensure crisis response is truly human-centred.

For more information, see the British Red Cross reports, *Harnessing the Power of Kindness* (2018) and *Ready for Anything* (2019).







# Executive summary

## Introduction

Crisis response in the UK involves a diverse range of national and local organisations. National organisations and guidance clearly have a vital role to play in setting strategic direction. However, the responsibility for crisis planning and response at a local level in England lies with 38 local resilience forums, bringing together, among others, emergency responders, local authorities, the NHS, the Environment Agency, and local voluntary and community sector organisations.

Local resilience forums tailor local planning and response based on geography, demography, local risks and community assets. Clearly, a flood-prone rural community will need a different approach to crisis than a densely populated urban area.

Yet the British Red Cross reports, *Harnessing the Power of Kindness and Ready for Anything*<sup>1</sup> identified some central principles that should always guide emergency planning and response. Most importantly, the British Red Cross advocates a human-centred crisis response, the involvement of people and communities at all stages of crisis planning, response and recovery, and close partnership between statutory, and voluntary and community sector organisations to achieve this.

With this in mind, the British Red Cross and partners undertook research to develop a clearer picture of crisis planning and response at a local level and to identify best practice. This research<sup>2</sup> examined local resilience forum plans and processes to explore:

- the extent and nature of the involvement of voluntary and community sector organisations in the structures and processes of local resilience forums

- the extent to which local resilience plans considered and addressed the varied practical and psychosocial needs of people at times of crisis, and the extent to which the support offered was shaped by local communities.

The findings of this research are used to make constructive recommendations for local and national bodies involved in crisis planning and response to ensure that people and communities are at the heart of crisis response in England. Informed by the findings of this report, the British Red Cross will be reviewing structures and plans in each nation of the UK, to develop an understanding of variation and to identify examples of best practice.

## Key findings

- All local resilience forums have worked hard to ensure voluntary and community sector organisations are involved in their plans and structures. We also found that local resilience forums could do more to make the most of the expertise and community insight of voluntary and community organisations:
  - Local resilience forums typically only engaged with voluntary sector organisations that have experience of emergency response work, missing out on insight and expertise of a broader range of voluntary and community sector organisations.
  - Local resilience forums utilise the expertise of the voluntary and community sector organisations to undertake activities which focus on building coordination, skills and capacity within the sector, rather contributing to the local resilience forum's broader work. This meant that support and planning sometimes appeared fragmented.

1 British Red Cross (2018). *Harnessing the Power of Kindness*. <https://www.redcross.org.uk/-/media/documents/about-us/research-publications/emergency-response/harnessing-the-power-of-kindness-for-communities-in-crisis.pdf> (Accessed 6 November 2019). British Red Cross (2019). *Ready for Anything*. <https://www.redcross.org.uk/ready-for-anything> (Accessed 6 November 2019).

2 This report presents findings from three strands of research: a review of local resilience forum plans (British Red Cross); a survey of voluntary and community sector representatives in local resilience forums (Voluntary and Community Sector Emergencies Partnership); and a survey of NAVCA members.



- There are barriers to communication and engagement between local resilience forums and voluntary and community sector organisations.
- While most local resilience forum plans broadly covered the practical and psychosocial needs of individuals and communities at times of crisis, the plans **did not offer detailed guidance on flexible approaches to support**. In particular:
  - **A lack of personalised support.** Most plans covered basic humanitarian needs, yet did not consider how such support could be personalised. For example, 85 per cent of local resilience forums whose plans were reviewed mentioned providing food, yet only 44 per cent considered dietary requirements.
  - **Prioritisation of short-term needs.** The emergency plans consistently prioritised short-term needs over longer-term support. Longer-term issues tended to be considered within the remit of other bodies such as local authorities, or were featured in other specific plans such as the Recovery Plan, highlighting a lack of joining up between different strategies.
  - **Information and communication.** Although all local resilience forums considered this aspect of emergency response to some extent, 30 per cent did not explicitly designate a central communication channel. Only 52 per cent of the plans referred extensively to ensuring privacy and data protection, and only 70 per cent included measures to translate communications so everyone could understand them.
  - **Psychosocial and mental health support.** Ninety-three per cent of local resilience plans referred to longer-term mental health support, but most plans lacked provision for short-term psychosocial support during and immediately after a crisis.
  - **Vulnerability.** Only 30 per cent of emergency plans defined vulnerable people, and they mainly focused on older people, children and individuals with disabilities. They did not

commonly mention other factors like poverty, irregular immigration status, pre-existing homelessness and geographical isolation, all of which can have a bearing on how crises affect people and communities.

## Recommendations

Based on these findings, the British Red Cross developed the following recommendations for national and local government, statutory bodies and the voluntary and community sector, all of whom have an important role to play in making crisis response in the UK the best it can be. These recommendations are designed to ensure that local resilience forums and local voluntary and community sector organisations are able to combine expertise and insight, and to ensure a truly a human-centred approach to crisis response.

### Promoting best practice at the local level

- **Local resilience forums should use the British Red Cross voluntary and community sector checklist for local resilience forums** (see **Appendix 1**) to ensure that local plans cater for the varied and individual needs of people in emergencies, and that local communities are engaged with local planning processes. The Cabinet Office should endorse this list as part of its *Community Resilience Development Framework*.<sup>3</sup>
- **Building on and sharing best practice.** The review found there is a disconnect between national guidance and local planning. The British Red Cross recommends that the government continues to play a greater role in supporting local resilience forums to share best practice and maintain national standards, for example conducting regular national reviews of plans and implementing the Cabinet Office's *Community Resilience Development Framework*, which

3 Cabinet Office (2019). *Community Resilience Development Framework*. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/828813/20190902-Community\\_Resilience\\_Development\\_Framework\\_Final.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/828813/20190902-Community_Resilience_Development_Framework_Final.pdf) (Accessed 6 November 2019).



includes supporting communities of practice, developing guidance, tools, campaigns and projects, and scaling up best practice. This work should be taken forward in partnership with the voluntary and community sector.

## National legislation, policy and guidance

- **A future-proofed legislative framework and a clearer role for the voluntary and community sector.** The Government should review regulations and guidance under the Civil Contingencies Act<sup>4</sup> to ensure the legislation is fit for the changing nature of crisis response in the UK and outlines a clearer role for the voluntary sector. This legislation dates from 2004, and everyone in the crisis response sector since then has learnt important lessons from the national crises of 2017 (including the Manchester Arena and London Bridge terror attacks, and the Grenfell Tower fire), and are adapting to new and evolving threats

such as the increased risk of climate crisis-related events. Enshrining a clearer role for the voluntary sector would also ensure that voluntary and community organisations were consistently and thoroughly embedded within local resilience forums, improving their ability to plan a human-centred approach.

- **Improved guidance for local resilience forums.** The government should review its emergency response legislation and guidance (such as the Civil Contingencies Act and the Cabinet Office's *Human Aspects in Emergency Management*<sup>5</sup>) to ensure that the plans formulated by local resilience forums fully meet the humanitarian needs of their communities, from psychosocial help to longer-term support. This should be complemented by resources and funding to encourage innovative new ways of meeting people's individual needs, such as providing cash-based assistance and introducing the role of emergency navigator.



4 HM Government. Civil Contingencies Act 2004. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/36/contents> (Accessed 6 November 2019).

5 Cabinet Office (2016). Human Aspects in Emergency Management: Guidance on Supporting Individuals Affected by Emergencies. HM Government. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/564306/human\\_aspects\\_guidance\\_2016\\_final.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/564306/human_aspects_guidance_2016_final.pdf) (Accessed 6 November 2019).



# Introduction

## What we know so far: UK crisis planning, response and recovery

The British Red Cross combines its extensive emergency response operational expertise with original research and advocacy to improve how people prepare for and are supported during and after emergencies. This approach helps to understand better the experiences of people at times of crisis and how all those involved in crisis planning and response – statutory organisations, blue-light responders and national and local voluntary and community organisations – can work together to put people and their individual needs at the heart of emergency response.

Our insights reveal the varied factors that influence the effectiveness of crisis response. The British Red Cross knows that national structures and guidance have a central role to play, and has strongly advocated a more joined up approach between national government and voluntary and community organisations at times of crisis. The British Red Cross has been a leading partner, for instance, in the establishment of the Voluntary and Community Sector Emergencies Partnership, the National Emergencies Support Line and the National Emergencies Trust (see **Box 1**).

British Red Cross research and expertise has also shown, however, that local structures and processes are equally important. Even the most nationally significant tragedies, such as the terror attacks and the Grenfell Tower fire of 2017, occur in a local community, with highly unique demographics, community networks and assets.

British Red Cross reports<sup>6</sup> have identified some central principles that should guide emergency planning and response, such as ensuring the needs of individuals are met swiftly and responsively, and that local communities are empowered to shape local plans, and

are involved in response and recovery. Crisis response cannot be 'one size fits all', and many of the recommendations here focus on the importance of tailoring local plans to the needs, strengths and vulnerabilities of local communities.

## Understanding local crisis response, planning and recovery

Responsibility for crisis preparedness, response and recovery at a local level in England lies with 38 local resilience forums (see **Box 2**). Across the country, the British Red Cross chairs or plays a substantive role in local resilience forums, coordinating the collective efforts of other voluntary sector partners.

From this operational experience, the British Red Cross knows that local resilience forums vary in how they engage with the voluntary and community sector.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, in the British Red Cross consultation with individuals who have a lived experience of emergencies<sup>8</sup> has found that, when crisis strikes, systems and processes can often take precedence over providing holistic and personalised support to the people impacted.

The 2019 British Red Cross report *Ready for Anything* – with interviews with staff, volunteers and people who had experienced emergency situations, as well as based on a survey of 5,000 members of the public – outlined that this support should include providing for immediate practical needs, communicating essential information, providing mental health and psychosocial support, and helping people to rebuild their lives in the longer term through advocacy, advice and ongoing support. It is also important in emergency situations to provide specialised help for people who are especially vulnerable – whether this is due to age, illness, isolation or any other reason.

6 British Red Cross (2018). *Harnessing the Power of Kindness*. British Red Cross (2019). *Ready for Anything*.

7 British Red Cross (2018). *Harnessing the Power of Kindness*.

8 British Red Cross (2019). *Putting People at the Heart of Emergency Response*. <https://www.redcross.org.uk/ready-for-anything> (Accessed 6 November 2019).



## **Box 1: Voluntary and Community Sector Emergencies Partnership, National Emergencies Support Line, National Emergencies Trust**

### **Voluntary and Community Sector Emergencies Partnership**

The chief aim of this partnership<sup>9</sup> is to improve coordination of the sector at national and local levels before, during and after emergencies – while empowering communities to help shape the process. It brings together local, national and international expertise from the voluntary and community sector to help people to prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies, so that they can rebuild their lives.

It also has an influencing and advocacy role and gives a voice to people at risk of or affected by disasters and emergencies in the UK. Its members work to connect communities and the people who represent them, so that the differing needs of individuals are at the heart of any response. Combining resources and a range of insights on the ground, the partnership builds capacity and shares best practice in preventing and dealing with emergencies, as well as driving innovation.

### **National Emergencies Support Line**

In direct response to learning from the events of 2017, members of the Voluntary and Community Sector Emergencies Partnership have worked with partners to create a single point of contact for the public when there is a serious incident or emergency.

This free-to-call number [REDACTED] will be promoted as soon as an emergency is declared, to ensure that anyone needing practical or emotional support receives it. People answering calls will deal with needs directly, or swiftly transfer or signpost callers to local or national bodies able to offer the support they need. Members of the public wishing to donate money or goods will also be directed to do so.

### **National Emergencies Trust**

The role of the National Emergencies Trust is to provide a coordinated, national focus for donations and fundraising, and to provide the capacity to commission effective and informed grant distribution in situations where those distribution mechanisms do not already exist.

Yet the reports of the Independent Grenfell Recovery Taskforce, the Kerslake Arena Review, and the findings in reports from the voluntary and community sector all highlighted that, following the terror attacks in London and Manchester and the Grenfell Tower Fire in 2017, these diverse needs were not always met.<sup>10</sup>

As such, the British Red Cross undertook the research set out in this report to understand better the extent to which local resilience forums involve local individuals and communities in their planning and response, and the extent to which their plans meet individual and community needs in a human-centred way following an emergency.

9 British Red Cross, St John Ambulance, National Council for Voluntary Organisations, National Association for Voluntary and Community Action, Salvation Army, UK Community Foundations, Victim Support, Muslim Aid, National Police Chiefs' Council, Cabinet Office, Minister of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Business in the Community, Association of Greater Manchester Authorities.

10 Almeida, R and Morcz, A (2017). Responding to Terror Attacks: Providing Support to Those Affected in England and Wales. Victim Support. <https://www.victimsupport.org.uk/sites/default/files/Victim%20Support%20-%20Responding%20to%20terror%20attacks.pdf> (Accessed 6 November 2019). British Red Cross (2018). Harnessing the Power of Kindness for Communities. Kerslake Arena Review (no date). The Kerslake Report: An Independent Review into the Preparedness for, and Emergency Response to, the Manchester Arena Attack on 22nd May 2017. [https://www.kerslakearenareview.co.uk/media/1022/kerslake\\_arena\\_review\\_printed\\_final.pdf](https://www.kerslakearenareview.co.uk/media/1022/kerslake_arena_review_printed_final.pdf) (Accessed 6 November 2019). Muslim Aid (2018). Mind the Gap: A Review of the Voluntary Sector Response to the Grenfell Tragedy. <https://www.muslimaid.org/media-centre/news/grenfell-report> (Accessed 6 November 2019).



## Box 2: Local resilience forums

Local resilience forums 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.<sup>11</sup> There are 38 forums in England.

Local resilience forums are coordinating bodies and are made up of various agencies, including emergency services, local authorities, the NHS and the Environment Agency. They are supported by organisations such as the Highways Agency, and business and voluntary bodies.

The composition and role of local resilience forums is determined by the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 and its accompanying non-statutory guidance.<sup>12,13</sup>

When a crisis of a particular scale strikes, a local resilience forum's plans are put into action by the strategic coordinating group – which consists of representatives from the organisations that sit on the forum – and this group later evolves into a recovery coordinating group.

## Research methods

This report outlines findings from three strands of research:

- **Survey of voluntary and community sector representatives in local resilience forums (Voluntary and Community Sector Emergencies Partnership):** the Emergencies Partnership (see **Box 1**) surveyed voluntary and community sector representatives on local resilience forums. The aim of this was to discover how – and how often – local resilience forums engaged with voluntary and community organisations. Representatives of 27 of the 38 forums responded.

- **Review of local resilience forum plans (British Red Cross):** the British Red Cross reviewed local resilience forum plans to see whether they followed human-centred principles – outlined in the reports *Ready for Anything* and *Harnessing the Power of Kindness*. Twenty-seven of the 38 forums provided the British Red Cross with two or more of the five plans they were requested to produce.<sup>14</sup>
- **Survey of National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA) membership:** NAVCA surveyed 45 of its member charities to find out how well local resilience forums engaged with the broader voluntary sector.

11 Cabinet Office (2019). Local Resilience Forums: Contact Details. HM Government. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/local-resilience-forums-contact-details> (Accessed 6 November 2019).

12 Cabinet Office (2006). Emergency Preparedness: Guidance on Part 1 of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, its Associated Regulations and Non-statutory Arrangements. HM Government. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/emergency-preparedness> (Accessed 6 November 2019).

13 Cabinet Office (2013). Emergency Response and Recovery: Non Statutory Guidance Accompanying the Civil Contingencies Act 2004. HM Government. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/253488/Emergency\\_Response\\_and\\_Recovery\\_5th\\_edition\\_October\\_2013.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/253488/Emergency_Response_and_Recovery_5th_edition_October_2013.pdf) (Accessed 6 November 2019).

14 The overarching emergency plan (also referred to as the Major Incidents Framework, or Multi-Agency Response Protocol), Humanitarian Assistance/Human Aspects Plan (also referred to as Care of People Plan), Community Risk Register, Rest Centre Plan (also referred to as the Evacuation and Shelter Plan), and the Warning and Informing/Communications Plan.

# Findings and reflections: engagement with the voluntary and community sector

This section outlines the findings of the surveys by the Voluntary and Community Sector Emergencies Partnership and NAVCA. These explored the involvement of voluntary and community organisations in local resilience forums, the types of voluntary and community organisations involved in local resilience forums, and how forums communicated and engaged with the sector.

## Involvement of voluntary and community organisations in local resilience forums

**Why is it important for local resilience forums to involve the voluntary and community sector in their structures and processes?** Voluntary and community organisations have insights into the experiences and needs of the broader community, and of vulnerable individuals within it. The voluntary sector can make sure that plans are human-centred, focusing on the needs of the individuals and communities at the heart of an emergency – which should be a key principle of emergency planning. Including the voluntary and community sector ensures that plans also draw on local assets such as existing community networks.

**Encouragingly, all local resilience forums had processes to involve voluntary and community sector representatives. This involvement was often limited, though, to a specific voluntary sector subgroup of the local resilience forum, preventing the local voluntary sector from contributing to the wider work of the local resilience forum.**

- The review of local resilience forum plans found that most local resilience forums had voluntary sector representatives, and 85 per cent had a voluntary and community sector subgroup.
- The voluntary and community sector subgroups' main tasks focused on identifying how voluntary organisations could contribute to emergency preparedness, response and recovery. This included developing a directory of how different organisations could help, providing training, and developing processes and guidance for managing spontaneous volunteers.
- The impact of these subgroups was often limited, however. They met in formal meetings or in exercises, quarterly or even less frequently, which prevented regular opportunities to build relationships or to get properly involved with preparation work.
- The review also found that only some local resilience forums involved the voluntary and community sector in broader structures and planning, for example by having voluntary sector representation on other subgroups of the local resilience forum, not just the voluntary sector subgroup.

**CASE STUDY:** Bedfordshire and Luton has a voluntary subgroup called the Bedfordshire Local Emergency Voluntary Executive Committee.<sup>15</sup> The committee holds formal meetings twice a year and also runs evening training sessions every month, along with an annual live exercise. The events reflect the risks of the area, and include plane crashes, major floods and severe weather. These sessions give volunteers the opportunity to get to know one another, share knowledge and better understand what other members can do.

<sup>15</sup> Bedfordshire Local Resilience Forum. Become an Emergency Volunteer. <https://www.bedfordshireprepared.org.uk/become-an-emergency-volunteer> (Accessed 8 November 2019).



**CASE STUDY:** Cleveland, Northumbria, and County Durham and Darlington<sup>16</sup> local resilience forums have their own voluntary emergency liaison groups, and the three forums joined forces to create an annual liaison group awareness day to improve understanding and encourage participation. This activity stems from a workshop in July 2016 where an action plan was developed for sharing and cooperation, risk management, training and exercise, warning and informing, resilient telecoms, and community resilience.

## Types of voluntary and community organisations involved in local resilience forums

**Why is it important for local resilience forums to engage a broad range of voluntary and community organisations?** Voluntary and community organisations, including those not solely focused on crisis response, have a broad range of insights and expertise that may be useful to local resilience forums. For example, the British Red Cross report, *Harnessing the Power of Kindness*, highlighted that local resilience plans should reflect the community's cultural and religious diversity.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, community organisations such as faith groups – who also support longer-term needs and play a vital part in broader community resilience – have a key role in local resilience forums.

**Local resilience forums often engaged only with voluntary sector organisations that had specific expertise in crisis response.<sup>18</sup>**



- Most voluntary sector subgroups of local resilience forums were made up of voluntary organisations whose expertise was primarily in responding to emergencies, such as providing vehicles or technical support. For example, the British Red Cross was the only organisation consistently represented across voluntary sector subgroups that provided psychosocial support. Other voluntary and community sector organisations such as Cruse Bereavement Care and Victim Support were occasionally included. Organisations that offered longer-term support, advice and advocacy were rarely represented in local resilience forums.
- Few voluntary and community sector subgroups included local community organisations. Only just over half of the 45 local community organisations across England who responded to the NAVCA survey were involved with their local resilience forum.
- Engagement with religious or belief-based groups was, on the whole, limited: only two non-Christian faith organisations, such as Islamic Relief, were represented on local resilience forum voluntary sector subgroups.
- A limited number of local resilience forums – in London, for example – had separate faith subgroups. In this case, the chair of the voluntary sector subgroup sat on the faith subgroup and vice versa, ensuring that the two groups collaborated.

<sup>16</sup> County Durham and Darlington Local Resilience Forum (no date). Annual Report 2016-2017. <https://www.durham.police.uk/Documents/County%20Durham%20and%20Darlington%20LRF%20Annual%20Report%202016-17%20FINAL.docx.pdf> (Accessed 8 November 2019).

<sup>17</sup> British Red Cross (2018). *Harnessing the Power of Kindness*.

<sup>18</sup> The Voluntary and Community Sector Emergencies Partnership review of engagement between the voluntary and community sector and local resilience forums.



## Communication and engagement between local resilience forums and voluntary organisations, and communities themselves

### Why are communications and engagement between local resilience forums and voluntary and community sector organisations, and the community itself, important?

We know that a joined-up and effective crisis response depends on clear lines of communication and engagement between everyone involved. Communication and engagement in 'peace-time' can help to ensure that, when crisis strikes, accurate information can be shared quickly.

### All three strands of the research found that communication and engagement between local resilience forums and voluntary and community sector organisations was inconsistent.

- NAVCA's survey of local voluntary sector organisations found 91 per cent (41 of 45) were not aware of their local resilience forum's plans, and 62 per cent (28 of 45) said there were barriers to good communications with local resilience forums.
- A minority of local resilience forum websites mentioned voluntary organisations, and most forums' plans were not widely accessible online, except for the Community Risk Register.<sup>19</sup>
- The Voluntary and Community Sector Emergencies Partnership survey found that most voluntary and community sector subgroups met at formal quarterly meetings, and that this made it more difficult for smaller, voluntary-led organisations to attend because the groups covered such wide areas. One local resilience forum realised that these smaller organisations

were having trouble attending meetings and so began to vary meeting venues around the county to improve attendance.

- There are clear, broader barriers to voluntary and community sector engagement and participation. For example, only 26 per cent of the local resilience forum plans (7 of 27) reviewed by the British Red Cross contained explicit guidance on appropriate vetting and training for those working with vulnerable people, and NAVCA's survey found several voluntary and community sector subgroup members said they were unsure about when a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check was required, or about how to obtain one for volunteers.<sup>20</sup>

**CASE STUDY:** The Greater Manchester local resilience forum engages with the Greater Manchester Centre for Voluntary Organisation, which includes a broad range of voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations.<sup>21</sup>

## Recommendations

To enable local and national stakeholders to support the voluntary and community sector's engagement in and contribution to local resilience forums, the following is recommended.

### Promoting best practice at a local level:

- **Local resilience forums should adopt the British Red Cross voluntary and community sector checklist for local resilience forums** (see **Appendix 1**) to ensure that local plans cater for the varied and individual needs of people in emergencies, and that local communities are engaged with local planning processes. The Cabinet Office should endorse this list as part of its *Community Resilience Development Framework*.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> The Community Risk Register identifies and assesses the hazards that might affect the local resilience forum area.

<sup>20</sup> Details of DBS requirements for volunteers are outlined in the Cabinet Office's guidance (2019): Planning the Coordination of Spontaneous Volunteers. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/planning-the-coordination-of-spontaneous-volunteers>.

<sup>21</sup> GMCVO (2019). GMCVO Members. Greater Manchester Centre for Voluntary Organisation. <https://www.gmcvo.org.uk/gmcvomembers> (Accessed 6 November 2019).

<sup>22</sup> Cabinet Office (2019). Community Resilience Development Framework. HM Government. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/828813/20190902-Community\\_Resilience\\_Development\\_Framework\\_Final.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/828813/20190902-Community_Resilience_Development_Framework_Final.pdf) (Accessed 6 November 2019).



### CASE STUDY: Supporting local engagement

At the national level, the membership of the Voluntary and Community Sector Emergencies Partnership reflects the breadth of the voluntary and community sector, with representatives from local, national and international organisations, and from both voluntary and community backgrounds. The partnership will create task-and-finish groups to work with voluntary and community sector leads in local resilience forums, where necessary, to help to improve the relationship between the forums and the voluntary and community sector, and to unlock the potential of the latter. The task-and-finish groups will operate at both local and national levels with a focus on the following.

- **Training and learning.** Developing and supporting the voluntary and community sector to engage with local resilience forums. This could include training opportunities for voluntary and community sector representatives on the role and function of local resilience forums, identifying strategies to help voluntary and community sector organisations to prepare to work closely with each other and statutory agencies.
- **Governance and support.** Helping to give individual voluntary and community sector organisational governance and support in the event, and in anticipation, of a crisis. This includes the development of policies and good practice on issues such as the onboarding of volunteers, data regulations in crisis situations, and exercising and training.
- **Communication.** Raising awareness of the partnership as a resource for local resilience forums and the voluntary and community sector.

#### - **Building on and sharing best practice.**

The review found a disconnect between national guidance and local planning. The British Red Cross recommend that the government continues to play a greater role in supporting local resilience forums to share best practice and maintain national standards, for example by regular national reviews of plans and implementing the Cabinet Office's *Community Resilience Development Framework*, which includes supporting communities of practice, developing guidance, tools, campaigns and projects, and scaling up best practice. This work should be taken forward in partnership with the voluntary and community sector.

#### **National legislation, policy and guidance:**

- **A future-proofed legislative framework and a clearer role for the voluntary and community sector.** The government should review the Civil Contingencies Act<sup>23</sup> and

its regulations and guidance to ensure the legislation is fit for the changing nature of crisis response in the UK and outlines a clearer role for the voluntary sector. This legislation dates from 2004; since then, all those in the crisis response sector have learnt important lessons from the national crises of 2017 (including the Manchester Arena and London Bridge terror attacks, and the Grenfell Tower fire), and are adapting to new and evolving threats such as the increased risk of climate crisis-related events. Enshrining a clearer role for the voluntary sector would also ensure that voluntary and community organisations are consistently and thoroughly embedded within the local resilience forums, improving their ability to plan a human-centred approach to emergencies.

23 HM Government. Civil Contingencies Act 2004.

# Findings and reflections: human-centred plans

This section outlines the findings of the research undertaken by the British Red Cross with respect to the extent to which local resilience forums embedded a human-centred approach to crisis planning and response. The review focused in particular on the extent to which local resilience plans took a personalised approach to:

- meeting immediate practical needs
- communication, information and privacy for people and communities
- mental health and psychosocial support
- long-term support
- vulnerable groups at times of crisis.

## Meeting immediate practical needs

**What are people's immediate needs at times of crisis?** The British Red Cross polled over 5,000 members of the public,<sup>24</sup> who told us what their immediate needs would be when a crisis occurred. These focused on immediate practical needs such as food, shelter and privacy, essential information and psychosocial support. The research also highlighted the importance of ensuring that this support was tailored to individual circumstances, for example by ensuring dietary requirements were provided for and that people felt safe in the accommodation provided. Similarly, giving people money – rather than goods or preselected accommodation – can preserve their dignity and help them to feel more empowered to make decisions about their own recovery.

**The British Red Cross review found that local resilience forum emergency plans, in general, considered most of the immediate needs of people following an emergency but that planning did not address how this support would be tailored to individual needs.**

- Sixty-three per cent of local resilience forums (17 of 27) mentioned providing items such as mattresses, bedding and clothes to people affected by emergencies.
- Eighty-nine per cent of local resilience forums (24 of 27) also discussed finding people immediate or short-term emergency shelter, whether through B&Bs, hotels, rental accommodation or staying with relatives.
- Local resilience forum plans often referred to making sure that any buildings used for shelter were secure. However, private, lockable and secure

### CASE STUDY: Cash-based assistance

The British Red Cross believes that cash assistance should be part of the response to major crises in the UK. This approach is standard in international emergencies. In a poll of 5,000 members of the public, cash assistance was viewed as equal to receiving accommodation or emergency items during an emergency.<sup>25</sup> The British Red Cross will be offering cash assistance as part of its emergency response by the end of 2019, and recommends this approach is adopted widely at both the local and national levels. The organisation also want the barriers that stop people taking up offers of cash to be removed. For example, the inappropriate sharing of information means that some recipients who take up cash assistance are penalised through other avenues if they receive benefits or other support.

<sup>24</sup> British Red Cross (2019). Ready for Anything.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.



units for people or households *within* such shelters were mentioned in only seven per cent of the local resilience forums (two of 27).

- A number of the plans considered religious and cultural sensitivities, or the need for privacy based on gender.
- Eighty-nine per cent of local resilience forum plans (24 of 27) mentioned providing food immediately after an emergency, yet only 44 per cent (12 of 27) considered dietary requirements.
- Only one of 27 local resilience forums had plans mentioning the potential provision of direct cash assistance to people affected by emergencies.

## Communication, information and privacy for people and communities

### Why are information and communication so important at times of crisis?

At times of crisis, people need accurate, accessible and timely information, and people also need to be able to contact family and friends. Effective communication is particularly important since 70 per cent of the people the British Red Cross polled for the *Ready for Anything* report admitted that nobody in their household had taken steps to prepare for an emergency.<sup>26</sup>

The national incidents of 2017 and the experiences of individuals affected by emergencies outlined in *Ready for Anything* demonstrate how challenging the provision of accurate information can be in a crisis. Websites belonging to statutory organisations can be time-consuming to update, and stakeholders in the media and social media need to be included within local resilience forums' plans and networks at times of crisis.

### Why are data sharing and privacy important at times of crisis?

Gathering information about who has been impacted at a time of crisis is an essential part of emergency response. Many different organisations – local authorities, the police, NHS services and voluntary and community organisations – may need to gather personal data, and there is great value in these bodies being able to share data as appropriate to ensure a joined-up response.

However, even at times of crisis, data protection and privacy are paramount. The need for data and information to be handled securely was highlighted in *Ready for Anything*, and data protection is a particularly complicated issue for vulnerable people. Giving the appropriate people access to data can help to avoid the risks of under-sharing – as commonly mentioned across emergency plans – and to ensure that vulnerable individuals are identified and properly supported. However, a lack of explanation to service users of how their data would be processed and by whom, or poor data-protection practices, can prevent vulnerable groups and individuals – such as those with irregular immigration status – from accessing services.

The British Red Cross recommends that the *Data Sharing Code of Practice*<sup>27</sup> of the Information Commissioner's Office, and the Cabinet Office's *Data Protection and Sharing Guidance for Emergency Planners and Responders*,<sup>28</sup> endorse statutory authorities working with voluntary sector organisations – to build more constructive working relationships and agree new, clear protocols for effective information sharing.

26 British Red Cross (2019). *Ready for Anything*.

27 ICO (2011). *Data Sharing Code of Practice*. Information Commissioner's Office. [https://ico.org.uk/media/for-organisations/documents/1068/data\\_sharing\\_code\\_of\\_practice.pdf](https://ico.org.uk/media/for-organisations/documents/1068/data_sharing_code_of_practice.pdf) (Accessed 6 November 2019).

28 Cabinet Office. *Data Protection and Sharing in Emergencies – Guidance for Local Authority Responders*. HM Government. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/60971/data\\_protection\\_handout.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/60971/data_protection_handout.pdf) (Accessed 6 November 2019).



### **Local resilience forums plans did address the provision of timely information, but more could have been done to ensure communications would be widely accessible at times of crisis.**

- All the local resilience forum plans the British Red Cross reviewed had communications strategies, often in dedicated 'warning and informing' or communications plans.
- Seventy per cent of the local resilience forums (19 of 27) talked about having a central source of communication, with coordinated messages across various communications platforms. Many had decided that the website of the lead agency should be the central information source.
- Eighty-one per cent of local resilience forums (22 of 27) referred to the use of a single hotline, or coordinated phone lines, and this service was often associated with the British Red Cross.
- Yet ensuring communication was accessible for all was less of a priority. Only seventy per cent of local resilience forum plans (19 of 27) included measures for people who needed translated documents, devices or interpreting services.<sup>29</sup> In addition, only 48 per cent of plans (13 of 27) advised that communications points and/or devices such as phones and tablets would be made available so that people could contact others close to them and keep them updated about their situation.
- Fifty-two per cent of the plans (14 of 27) referred quite extensively to data-protection considerations, but few of these explicitly advised people involved in emergency operations to explain to those affected how their data would be used and stored, and who would have access to them.

## **Mental health and psychosocial support**

**The review found that, while most local resilience forums included provision for longer-term mental health support following a crisis, more could have been done to address immediate psychosocial needs.**

### **Why is mental health and psychosocial support so vital at times of crisis?**

Research and the experience of the British Red Cross have demonstrated that people need human contact, empathy and understanding both immediately and over the longer term following an incident. People need to be given time to reflect and to tell their story, to make sense of what has happened to them and to feel in control of what happens next.

Evidence increasingly shows the value of psychosocial support, such as that provided by the British Red Cross, in the early stages after a crisis. In 2017, for example, screening programmes were implemented not only to provide immediate support following an incident but also to enable mental health services to contact people at a later date, and to offer support at the time they might need it, even if that would be long after the incident.<sup>30</sup>

**What is a psychosocial support in crisis response?** Psychosocial support addresses the impact of the environment and a person's social connections on an individual's psychological wellbeing.<sup>31</sup>

A psychosocial approach at times of crisis recognises that crises can have devastating impacts on a person's environment and ability to maintain social networks. In this context, an individual may be less able to employ their usual coping strategies and may therefore become more vulnerable to stress and trauma.

- Almost all (93 per cent) of the local resilience forums surveyed by the British Red Cross specified that mental health or psychosocial support should be given to anyone affected by an emergency who might want or need such services.

<sup>29</sup> A commonly cited resource for emergency responders is the British Red Cross Emergency Multilingual Phrasebook (<https://store.redcross.org.uk/product/emergency-multilingual-phrasebook>).

<sup>30</sup> British Red Cross (2019). Ready for Anything.

<sup>31</sup> Vizzotto, ADB, (2013). Psychosocial Characteristics. In: Gellman, MD, Turner, JR (editors). Encyclopedia of Behavioral Medicine. Springer Link. [https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007%2F978-1-4419-1005-9\\_918](https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007%2F978-1-4419-1005-9_918) (Accessed 6 November 2019).



- However, the plans focused on mental health interventions that were provided in the medium or longer term – rather than immediately (excepting the triage by paramedics and the provision of first aid and potential psychological first aid). Some emergency plans noted that people may not want to access counselling or mental health services immediately after an incident when they are still processing what has happened, and this is in line with clinical guidance. These plans advised that people who were still experiencing difficult symptoms a few weeks after the event may benefit from counselling or mental health services.
- Mental health and psychosocial support should be available to emergency responders as well as to members of the community. Eighty-one per cent of local resilience forum plans (22 of 27) offered guidance for ensuring the welfare of emergency responders. This guidance varied considerably – from dealing with shift patterns, overtime and the physical facilities available, to providing psychological services.

### **Case study: British Red Cross Resilient Responders**

The British Red Cross Resilient Responders scheme provides resilience and improved wellbeing for emergency services personnel. Peer advocacy is central to the project, to encourage sustainability. The project will offer almost 7,000 psychosocial support sessions with statutory emergency response organisations, such as fire services and local authorities. There will be ten support sessions weekly in a combination of groups and one-to-one sessions provided by the British Red Cross psychosocial team.

## **Long-term support**

### **The British Red Cross review of local resilience forum plans found that local resilience forums could do more to plan for long-term needs – essential to recovery following a crisis.**

- In general, local resilience forum plans outlined how immediate support could evolve to meet the longer-term needs of the community

**Why is long-term support so vital to recovery following a crisis?** Long-term support, including advice and advocacy, is vital to help people and communities recover from crises and return to a 'new normal'. Most people affected by an emergency will need coordinated and consistent help to navigate the issues that come up afterwards, and this support empowers them to take control of their own recovery.

The length of support that people receive can vary, and is often determined by the nature of the crisis, which agencies are involved and any particular needs the person might have.

### **Multiple plans of local resilience forums.**

Part of the focus on shorter-term help could be because several local resilience forums also have separate recovery plans, which were not included within the British Red Cross review.

The broad and varied range of local resilience forum plans means the forums view activities such as response and recovery as distinct activities. The British Red Cross recognises that local resilience forums need multiple plans to provide detail for responders, and that different structures take forward different workstreams within these plans. However, the overarching emergency plan should include all components of the broader plan to provide a holistic framework, specifically providing an overview of how different plans interlink, and identifying periods of transition or looking at consistent themes, such as vulnerability.

As such, future reviews of local resilience forum plans should review both emergency and recovery plans (where they exist) for each local resilience forum.

appropriately. For example, 67 per cent of emergency plans (18 of 27) advised humanitarian help centres to gradually reduce their opening hours according to decreasing or evolving demand, and to move on to offering a virtual service, usually operated through a support website and potentially a support line.



- The plans placed greater emphasis on short-term care, rather than medium- or longer-term support. The British Red Cross review of local resilience forum plans found, for example, that 89 per cent (24 of 27) mentioned access to shelter in the short term but, when it came to longer-term accommodation, this dropped to 59 per cent (16 of 27), with local authorities generally designated as the relevant body to oversee longer-term accommodation needs assessments and provision.
- Most (19 out of 24) of the local resilience forum plans reviewed featured guidance on signposting or helping with issues that might affect people in the longer term following a crisis, such as assisting with insurance claims or longer-term accommodation. Other local resilience forums planned for appropriate advisers on insurance, law, benefits and finances in the support centres, and to provide contact details and advice there.
- While certain transient populations such as travellers/travelling communities were frequently mentioned as groups who may be vulnerable in an emergency, tourists or visitors to the area were not commonly referenced specifically in emergency plans. One-third of local resilience forum plans (9 of 27) featured guidance for assisting transient populations.

## Vulnerable groups at times of crisis

### Why is it so important to consider the needs of vulnerable people at times of crisis?

An emergency impacts on different individuals and groups within a population in very different ways. The Civil Contingencies Act defines vulnerable people as those “less able to help themselves in the circumstances of an emergency”,<sup>32</sup> and this was the most commonly cited definition of vulnerability provided by the emergency plans reviewed.

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, socio-economic and cultural circumstances”.<sup>33</sup>

For example, a resilient individual with insurance and a broad network of friends and family is less likely to need support at times of crisis than an isolated person who is afraid to (or cannot) access statutory services.

At times of crisis, there is an important distinction between vulnerable people and groups who are either ‘known’ – for example through nurseries and care homes – or ‘unknown’ to local authorities and affiliated bodies. To find unknown vulnerable individuals, responders may rely on help from the community such as being informed by local residents of anyone who might need certain help or provisions.

### Who may need long-term support?

Communities impacted by crises can be communities by location or communities by circumstance. Long-term support should go beyond supporting people in a specific geographical area, as people who have been affected by an emergency may not live or work in the area where it occurred. A non-geographically based approach is vital for emergencies such as terrorism, where incidents often occur in public spaces with many visitors to an area. Only nine local resilience forums featured guidance for providing support to people affected who may be based outside of the geographical area of the emergency. The British Red Cross recommends that all local resilience forums find ways to support people based outside the area, such as by maintaining a virtual humanitarian assistance platform so that non-local people affected are able to access support.

31 Cabinet Office (2006). *Emergency Preparedness*. HM Government. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/emergency-preparedness> (Accessed 6 November 2019).

32 Cabinet Office (2019). *Community Resilience Development Framework*. HM Government. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/828813/20190902-Community\\_Resilience\\_Development\\_Framework\\_Final.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/828813/20190902-Community_Resilience_Development_Framework_Final.pdf) (Accessed 6 November 2019).



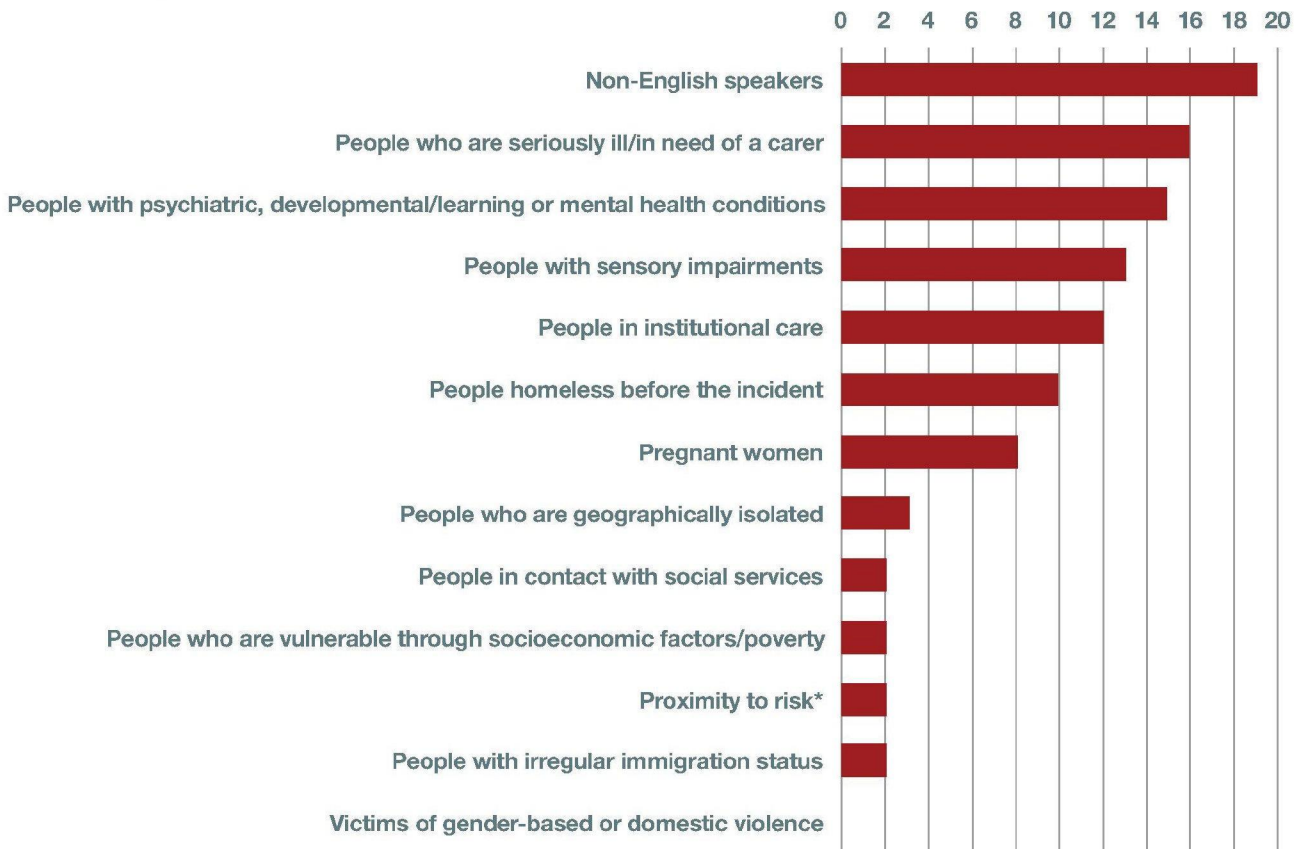
**The review found that local resilience forums needed to go much further to consider and address the varied vulnerabilities faced by local populations.**

- Only 30 per cent of local resilience forum plans (8 of 27) included a definition of vulnerability, and not all plans included measures for identifying and helping vulnerable people. This might have been because – as mentioned in many local resilience forum documents – the local authorities had dedicated plans for identifying and helping vulnerable people. However, as above, this does not take into account the value of a multi-agency approach to identifying and supporting vulnerable individuals.
- Forty-eight per cent of local resilience forum emergency plans (13 of 27) indicated that relevant local authority bodies would be the ones to identify ‘known’ vulnerable individuals

and groups. This was due to information held by local authorities that might ensure quicker and more efficient identification of vulnerable people and their specific needs, such as data on schools, social care services, nurseries and care homes.

- Where specific vulnerabilities were mentioned in local resilience forum plans, most focused on age – with 81 per cent (22 of 27) referring to the potential vulnerabilities of older people and 78 per cent (21 of 27) noting those of children and infants. Eighty-one per cent of plans (22 of 27) also considered people with disabilities or mobility issues as potentially being vulnerable in an emergency. Other potential vulnerabilities were less commonly considered (see the chart below). For example, very few local resilience forum plans mentioned the need to consider appropriate arrangements for people with substance addictions.

**Vulnerable groups included in local plans<sup>34</sup>**



\* This was mentioned implicitly throughout emergency plans, but without explicitly categorising communities or individuals as vulnerable.

34 This chart is based on plans from the 27 local resilience forums who provided two or more to the review.

## Recommendation

To enable local and national stakeholders to support the voluntary and community sector's engagement in and contribution to local resilience forums, the following is recommended.

### National legislation, policy and guidance:

- **Improved guidance for local resilience forums.** The government should review its emergency response legislation and guidance (such as the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 and the Cabinet Office's *Human Aspects*

*in Emergency Management*<sup>35</sup>) to ensure that the plans formulated by local resilience forums fully meet the humanitarian needs of their communities, from psychosocial help to longer-term support. This policy should be complemented by resources and funding to encourage innovative new ways of meeting people's individual needs, such as by providing cash-based assistance or introducing the role of emergency navigator.



35 Cabinet Office (2016). *Human Aspects in Emergency Management*.



# Recommendations

Based on these findings, the British Red Cross developed the following recommendations for national and local government, statutory bodies and the voluntary and community sector, all of whom have an important role to play in making crisis response in the UK the best it can be. These recommendations are designed to ensure that local resilience forums and local voluntary and community sector organisations are able to combine expertise and insight, and to ensure a truly human-centred approach to crisis response.

## Promoting best practice at the local level

- **Local resilience forums should adopt the British Red Cross voluntary and community sector checklist for local resilience forums** (see **Appendix 1**) to ensure that local plans cater for the varied and individual needs of people in emergencies, and that local communities are engaged with local planning processes. The Cabinet Office should endorse this list as part of its *Community Resilience Development Framework*.<sup>36</sup>
- **Building on and sharing best practice.** There is a disconnect between national guidance and local planning. The British Red Cross recommends that the government continues to play a greater role in supporting local resilience forums to share best practice and maintain national standards, for example by conducting regular national reviews of plans and implementing the Cabinet Office's *Community Resilience Development Framework*, which includes supporting communities of practice, developing guidance, tools, campaigns and projects, and scaling up best practice. The British Red Cross recommends that this work is taken forward in partnership with the voluntary and community sector.

## National legislation, policy and guidance

- **A future-proofed legislative framework and a clearer role for the voluntary and community sector.** The Government should review the Civil Contingencies Act<sup>37</sup> and its regulations and guidance, to ensure the legislation is fit for the changing nature of crisis response in the UK, and outlines a clearer role for the voluntary sector. This legislation dates from 2004; everyone in the crisis response sector since then has learnt important lessons from the national crises of 2017 (including the Manchester Arena and London Bridge terror attacks, and the Grenfell Tower fire) and are adapting to new and evolving threats such as the increased risk of climate crisis-related events. Enshrining a clearer role for the voluntary sector would also ensure that voluntary and community organisations are consistently and thoroughly embedded within local resilience forums, improving their ability to plan a human-centred approach to emergencies.
- **Improved guidance for local resilience forums.** The government should review its emergency response legislation and guidance (such as the Civil Contingencies Act and the Cabinet Office's *Human Aspects in Emergency Management*<sup>38</sup>) to ensure that the plans formulated by local resilience forums fully meet the humanitarian needs of their communities, from psychosocial help to longer-term support. This policy should be complemented by resources and funding to encourage innovative new ways of meeting people's individual needs, such as by providing cash-based assistance or introducing the role of emergency navigator.

36 Cabinet Office (2019). *Community Resilience Development Framework*.

37 HM Government. *Civil Contingencies Act 2004*.

38 Cabinet Office (2016). *Human Aspects in Emergency Management: Guidance on Supporting Individuals Affected by Emergencies*. HM Government. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/564306/human\\_aspects\\_guidance\\_2016\\_final.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/564306/human_aspects_guidance_2016_final.pdf) (Accessed 6 November 2019).



# Conclusion

This report shows that there is significant variation in the extent to which local crisis planning, response and recovery is human-centred – focused, that is, on providing personalised support that addresses people’s practical and psychosocial needs, and on supporting people and communities in the longer term to adapt to their new normal.

A strong and collaborative partnership between local statutory bodies and voluntary and community sector organisations is a powerful way to ensure that crisis planning and response is shaped by the needs and priorities of local communities. The reviews of current practice set out in this report found that too often, however, this partnership was weak or limited.

These recommendations – for local resilience forums, the voluntary and community sector, and the government and national agencies involved in crisis response – call on all those involved in supporting people at times of emergency to look at how we can work more closely together, whether through facilitating regular dialogue, sharing information or thinking innovatively about how to involve local communities in this work.

Most importantly, everyone involved in crisis response needs to ensure that the focus is always on how to maintain the dignity and autonomy of the people at the heart of an emergency. This means avoiding a one-size-fits-all model of support, or a focus on systems and structures, to instead focus on people’s personal experiences and priorities at times of crisis.





# Appendix 1

## Voluntary and community sector checklist for local resilience forums

1. Every local resilience forum should have a voluntary and community sector subgroup to coordinate voluntary engagement, meetings and training.
2. Each local resilience forum should keep a directory of the voluntary organisations they can call on. This should contain details of how each group can help, how to get them involved, and at least two current emergency contact numbers. This information should be available to forum members and should also be shared among other voluntary and community organisations.
3. Minutes should be taken during voluntary and community sector subgroup meetings, or at the very least, action points should be recorded. These minutes or action points should be easy to access (for example, via forum websites) and publicly available. Local resilience forums and borough resilience forums are about community readiness and engagement, so communities should feel included. An important part of this is transparency about how forums operate, and some redacting where appropriate can help to overcome issues relating to sensitive or confidential information.
4. Voluntary and community sector subgroups should run training sessions at least every two months – but ideally monthly – to allow members to share skills and better understand the capabilities of the group.
5. Local resilience forums should publish a lexicon of common emergency response terminology and circulate it among voluntary and community sector subgroup members to ensure everyone is using the same set of terms during incidents.
6. Local resilience forums should offer greater support with volunteer vetting/DBS checking.
7. Local resilience forum chairs and members often find out important information that should be shared with the relevant voluntary organisations, subject to UK security regulations.
8. Lead representatives of local resilience forums and the voluntary sector should be encouraged to publish a regular online newsletter for forum members, or could use social media to share experiences and successes with fellow subgroup members.
9. Voluntary and community subgroups should be included in local resilience forum live training exercises, and should be considered in the planning and execution of training events.
10. Subgroups should check members' availability before arranging meetings. Tools like Doodle are free and are an effective way of doing this.
11. It should be made easier for people to attend subgroup or local resilience forum meetings by varying meeting locations across the area covered by the forum.
12. Voluntary subgroup members should be able to attend meetings via conference call or video conference if they cannot be there in person. Where possible, the use of tools such as Zoom or Skype should also be encouraged by providing simple instructions and making it easy to use them.
13. Local resilience forums and voluntary and community sector subgroups should be encouraged to pool knowledge, and to train and collaborate with neighbouring areas and boroughs.
14. Local resilience forums should be encouraged to share learning to help improve the voluntary and community



sector's knowledge. This could take the form of newsletter articles, social media posts or agenda items for the next meeting. The London Resilience Group already does this monthly for the borough resilience forums. Voluntary organisations – especially the Voluntary and Community Sector Emergencies Partnership – will also be keen to discover examples of good practice or lessons learned at the local level from incidents.

15. Local and borough resilience forums should introduce a widely accessible system of communication such as WhatsApp. This can be a way of activating the voluntary sector in an emergency, as well as allowing voluntary and community sector subgroup members to communicate with one another.
16. Every local or borough resilience forum should be encouraged to use social

media as a means of driving voluntary and community engagement and promoting what they do. Social media channels such as Twitter can also be a useful way of activating the voluntary sector in an emergency, as well as issuing mass communications to affected communities.

Social media channels should be kept up to date to avoid confusion. Inactive social media accounts should be reactivated or deleted.

17. In an emergency, the public should be encouraged to help. Local resilience forums should adhere to the Cabinet Office's guidance, *Planning the Coordination of Spontaneous Volunteers in Emergencies*. Policies should reflect national good practice, should incorporate DBS (criminal record check) compliance and should be supported by a dynamic safeguarding risk assessment.





# Appendix 2

## About the organisations involved in this report

### British Red Cross

The British Red Cross helps millions of people in the UK and around the world to get the support they need if crisis strikes.

We do this with the help of staff, volunteers and supporters from all walks of life. They give up their time, offer their skills or donate money to help others. Together, we put kindness into action.

We are part of the global Red Cross and Red Crescent movement, and we believe in the power of kindness.

The British Red Cross is the leading voluntary sector crisis response organisation in the UK. In 2018, we responded to 1,400 emergencies in the UK – one every four hours. We provide emotional and practical support to people impacted by crises. The British Red Cross is also a humanitarian auxiliary to the government. We provide direct support to the statutory emergency services and are involved in national and local resilience forums, the bodies responsible for planning and response at a local level.

The British Red Cross works to make sure that people and communities are at the heart of how we deal with emergencies in the UK. Our operational expertise and policy, research and advocacy give us a unique insight into the varied factors that influence the effectiveness of crisis response in the UK. Our goal is a human-centred approach to crisis response: people and communities involved in every stage of planning, response and recovery following an emergency. This means that when crisis strikes, individual needs are met in a humanitarian and responsive way and that the response draws on the strengths and assets of local communities, such as existing community networks and insight.

### National Association for Voluntary and Community Action

The National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA) is the only national membership body for local voluntary sector support and development organisations in England. Nearly 180 NAVCA members support over 160,000 local charities and voluntary groups across England.

### Voluntary and Community Sector Emergencies Partnership

The Voluntary and Community Sector Emergencies Partnership aims to improve the coordination of the sector at national and local levels before, during and after emergencies, while empowering communities to help shape the process. It brings together local, national and international expertise from the voluntary and community sector to help people to prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies, so that they can rebuild their lives.

It also has an influencing and advocacy role and gives a voice to people affected by disasters and emergencies in the UK. Its members work to help to connect communities and the people who represent them, so that the differing needs of individuals are at the heart of any response.

Combining resources and a range of insights on the ground, the partnership improves abilities and shares best practice in preventing and dealing with emergencies, as well as driving innovation for the future.









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The British Red Cross Society, incorporated by Royal Charter 1906, is a charity registered in England and Wales (220949), Scotland (SC037738) and Isle of Man (0752).

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