Charter for Resilience

FIRE Editor **Andrew Lynch** and Security Correspondent **Dr Dave Sloggett** set out their vision for a complete overhaul in the UK's approach to global threats with a Charter for Resilience. This outlines a new architecture for society

In the last issue of *FIRE* we posed the question: 'Could the pandemic be the first step to resetting how society functions?' We outlined the key elements required to transform our approach in the white paper, *Coronavirus: A Five-Step Reset for Fire and Emergency Leaders*.

Integral to that approach is resetting resilient and connected communities. It is to these aspects that we turn our attention in calling for a Charter for Resilience and in the process analyse how this will lead to resetting fire and emergency response and the resultant reset required of a new dynamic style of leadership.

Given the impact on the economy, the health of the nation and the very infrastructure of society, we believe the tenets of the Charter for Resilience and suggested architecture will place the country on a permanent state of preparedness for the extreme threats we face.

The Charter for Resilience

- Society is placed on a permanent state of readiness to respond effectively to all national emergencies
- Structures are established to identify, analyse and provide oversight to all credible threats to national safety
- Reasonable steps are taken to ensure all scientific measures and technological advancements are aligned to reduce the impact of major threats
- A rapid response to all national threats is engrained at local, regional and national levels

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- The supporting infrastructure is in place to ensure an effective and timely response
- Effective systems are established to mitigate social and economic impact from national emergencies
- Community cohesion, collaboration and resilience are built into the fabric of daily life and form the cornerstone to national resilience.

We shall return to the new architecture for society required to underpin the Charter for Resilience. Firstly, we turn our attention to the changes needed to resilience structures in fire and emergency response and how the institutions of the emergency services need to adapt to an uncertain world.

For Whom the Bell Tolls

I suppose if a man has something once, always something of it remains

The quotation comes from Ernest Hemmingway's famous novel, *For Whom the Bell Tolls.* Set against the backdrop of the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s it remains an acclaimed novel. Its setting – the period when the Spanish political landscape fundamentally changed from democracy to fascism – provides a metaphor for the way in which society has to deal with the fallout from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Faced with the inevitable dramatic economic and social changes that will set the backdrop to the future post-Covid-19, we must retain our core values and beliefs. They must be what remains. One of these is the sanctity of human life and associated human rights. Irrespective of age, everyone has a contribution to make to our future, a point one 100-year-old veteran of World War II recently demonstrated so clearly.

For years the work of the emergency services in the UK, and probably elsewhere across the globe, has been taken for granted. When emergencies arise a simple call to an easily remembered number sees a series of actions put in place where either a firefighter, an ambulance or a police officer arrives to help. What is often ignored is that the people responding are often locally based, or forward deployed, to ensure the reaction is timely.

"Society has been put on notice"

The current crisis has rightly seen the National Health Service and specifically its staff praised for their efforts. While the emergency services are the fast responders, the NHS is there to pick-up-the-pieces of what arises from the initial emergency. This has been the status quo.

Vital questions, however, remain. Can the previous norm remain so in the future? Can we take for granted that the emergency services and the NHS will always be able to cope with shocks? What can be done immediately to help improve resilience to future threats?

Does that also mean the current institutional structures need to remain in place? What role does society require from the private sector in a crisis? Are some institutions in the UK wedded to the public sector to provide assistance and biased against any role for the private sector?

While the NHS has shown great ability to flex, supported by political necessity, others, such as Public Health England, appear to be dragging their feet. And in an approach that sensibly places the 'science' first, it is obvious that the generation of the basic data on what is happening needs to be tightened up.

A change in the way the Office for National Statistics operates is imperative. It cannot be right that when policy needs figures to make decisions of such a fundamental nature, it takes two weeks to process a death certificate. If policy is to lean on science then the data has to be available at the right levels of quality.

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We cannot have policy being made when people, including the hapless mainstream journalists who have shown themselves to be largely clueless in this crisis, do not grasp the basics of whether a person died 'of' Covid-19 or 'with' Covid-19. What is arguably a semantic point is actually vital for decision makers.

These are immediate and obvious areas where things can be quickly improved. The answer to that question in a millennium that will be affected by climate change and its by-products – future (more virulent) pandemics and possibly inter-state conflict – is clearly 'no'. How to create a society that has built-in resilience, something every citizen should expect from its government, is one of the fundamental questions to arise from the Covid-19 outbreak.

Resilient Structures

Society has been put on notice. We need flexible and responsive institutions and structures that can cope not only with the individual, and local, responses to the challenges that affect society at large.

This is the precursor of things to come. It applies to areas outside pandemics as well, such as flooding. This last winter has seen another round of major incidents. The so-called 100-year flood, against which defences were designed, needs to be removed as a benchmark. The timetable in which significant flooding now occurs is measured in weeks, not decades, and occurs throughout the year, not primarily focused in winter.

Pictures from California and Australia in the last few months also remind us of the risks from wildfires. And volcanologists would remind us all that a major eruption that could also have a huge impact on the world is due at some point.

What society has gone through over the past few weeks is simply an indicator of a much wider and more variable global environment that is increasingly uncertain. What were considered to be enduring structures and institutions that have underpinned society for decades now have to be called into question. The issue is, how do we make society more resilient in the face of such a range of threats?

Whilst centralisation is an obvious response to a national crisis and local services help with the immediate needs of people who are a risk, where is the optimum balance for resilient structures of live-saving responses that is efficient at the local level but can scale up to address more significant challenges?

History will show that the Covid-19 outbreak should have been anticipated. It was something for which the UK and other countries around the world could have been more prepared. This is something that can be concluded now.

There is no reason to wait for an inquiry to write a report after taking evidence from scores of people who will wish to have their say. It is a time where society needs to cut to the chase. The political will to hold a major public inquiry is also questionable. Who really wants to spend time when the vital need to get the economy back on its feet will be the priority?

Certain truths now remain. A simple analysis of recent epidemics and past pandemics showed that one day a virus, inherent in animals, would transfer to human beings and spread like wildfire. In many respects we are lucky that this virus has only mutated into three variants at present. Imagine if it was rapidly mutating: what hope for a vaccine at that point? Despite its challenges Covid-19 is still not the 'Virus X' that the World Health Organisation has envisaged. That would be far-more deadly.

It is entirely possible that the next pandemic will eclipse the current one in terms of its impact. This is not the time to hide away from what is self-evident. It is the time to prepare and create a greater basis for resilience across the United Kingdom.

Final Warning

The Covid-19 outbreak is a warning (arguably final) that societies across the globe have to consider carefully. If globalisation is to be restored in any form similar to what went before, and that is a highly questionable assumption, it needs to be underpinned by a worldwide set of food and hygiene standards that all countries, irrespective of their political ideologies, respect with transparency. With the outbreaks of SARS

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in 2003, Swine Flu in 2009, Ebola in 2014 and Zika in 2015, the world was put on notice that something could happen.

Raising international food and hygiene standards is one aspect of mitigation. It is a really important one. While bats are being sold in markets anywhere in the world for human consumption, there is a likelihood of a new outbreak of an even worse pandemic.

In October 2016 an exercise (Cygnus) testing the UK's response to such a pandemic concluded that we were unprepared for such an event and needed to stockpile basic personal protective equipment. The failure to take on board that simple recommendation provides one of the most important lessons that we need to learn from the current crisis.

The other equally important point is that a state, like the UK, which is the sixth largest economy in the world, simply has to have a more holistic approach to its resilience to this kind of outbreak. National supply lines have to be guaranteed. Reliance on overseas manufacturing sources will always be risky. Calling for a war-time effort to manufacture vital pieces such as ventilators and PPE was never going to be a sensible approach.

It is still possible that the government's initial approach to the pandemic that involved the 'contain' phase of the four-step strategy, may yet be proven to be the cause of a higher death toll. Whilst other countries were immediately entering lockdown and closing airports, the UK avoided the transition to full lockdown for two weeks until March 23. The jury remains out on the initial response of Whitehall to the pandemic.

It is not a question of if another major pandemic will sweep the world, it is a matter of when it happens and how prepared society is for the next event. All the time such variable standards exist in food hygiene, and globalisation enables people to quickly move from continent to continent, the world will be at risk.

At the time of writing the case count in the UK was approaching a maximum. The media has turned its attention to how the country emerges from lockdown. Shutting down society was, it turns out, relatively easy. Restoring it to a world-class economy set against the challenges of Brexit is another matter.

If it is accepted that the fundamental building block of a decent society is that it looks after all its people, irrespective of age, then what kind of resilience structures need to be in place? Do the current provision of the

Civil Contingencies Act remain relevant? Whilst there is much to be retained from the Act, what harm in upping the ante by introducing a more rigorous, far-reaching approach to resilience?

Regional Resilience

It is possible to suggest that while in the course of a national emergency it is inevitable that some degree of centralised control is required to help shape a national effort. It is clear that a balance has to be found between structures that remain able, for the periods between crises, to deliver responsive services at a local level, while also recognising the new threats to society require a more balanced (hybrid) approach to resilience. Something that has a regionalised focus with local and central authorities playing their role when required. This is what should underpin a Charter for Resilience that governs the way the country is adapted for future threats.

One argument that is worthy of debate is a move to a more regional backdrop for things like local resilience forums (restructured as Local Community Resilience Groups to include wider representation from community leaders and vested local interest groups). Is the current low level of granularity of these institutions sufficiently adaptable going forward? Do we really need to aggregate up these forums into a regional structure?

As the country emerges from lockdown one point is worth considering. It is highly risky to allow the nation to emerge from the current crisis in one step. The second wave of the Spanish

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Flu saw many more people die than in the first wave. The fear is that a quick national exit from lockdown, putting the economy first, may see chaos and civil disorder.

Whilst treating everyone in the country equally is important, arguments on how to lift the restrictions of lockdown require a more nuanced analysis. It can be seen that some regions will be asked to pioneer the emergence from lockdown, while others remain in hibernation. This can be argued to be fair to all as the risks are being shared.

Those who remain in lockdown will have to wait a little longer to revive their economic activities, while others gain the benefits of their economies starting up but with an additional risk of a second outbreak. Selecting areas in the country where spare capacity currently exists in the NHS makes sense. Wales, the South West and the East of England are all areas where government statistics have shown the outbreak is better contained.

So, an approach that allows these regions to emerge first, with intra-regional movement being permitted for residents but intra-regional movement being restricted to special cases, is a potential way forward. Regional resilience structures would be a great basis to help achieve that objective. Perhaps this is the model upon which future national resilience strategies can be built as we move towards a new architecture for society.

As the country emerges from the trauma of Covid-19 one essential truth must remain. To paraphrase Hemmingway: what we had before in our values and beliefs systems that underpin the emergency services remains intact. As Hemmingway noted: 'always something of it remains'. The current commitment of the members of the NHS and the wider emergency services demonstrate that simple and enduring point.

A New Architecture for Society

FIRE's white paper, *Coronavirus: A Five-Step Reset for Fire and Emergency Leaders* stated that a new architecture for society would emerge. We recommend that the new architecture for a Charter for Resilience should include the following:

- Independent Resilience Advisory Board charged with assessing resilience risks, overseeing the National Resilience Risk Register and issuing a monthly report to be made public, subject to security considerations.
- Rapid Response Task Force charged with planning for and overseeing all responses to national emergencies as the coordinating and executive body, also tasked with updating national capability.
- Local Community Resilience Groups charged with overseeing the delivery of the advisory board and task force recommendations, engaging local 'volunteer armies'.
- Resilience Research Group charged with investigating all credible threats and providing a Risk Matrix to inform the National Resilience Risk Register.
- Resilience Science Group charged with developing response models and strategies, overseen by the research group and liaising with the innovation alliance, below.
- Public-Private Innovation Alliance made up of a wide range of industry leaders (see the group including Formula 1 engineers reverse engineer ventilators) charged with developing new technologies to be proactive in meeting threats.
- International Liaison Panel to develop best practice and coordinate national response to global threats.
- Independent Resilience Exercise Group to plan and oversee robust local, regional and national multi-agency resilience exercises.
- Act of Parliament to put into legislation the aforementioned structure.
- Department for Resilience charged with overseeing delivery of the Resilience Charter.

Only through such a complete overhaul of the current infrastructure to align organisations and institutions – from government departments to local community resilience teams – can we ensure rapid and proportionate response to future national and international disasters. That is the new architecture for society; anything less will leave us critically vulnerable.

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