FIRE awarded *Press Gazette's* Coronavirus Journalism Excellence – Best Comment

A new architecture for society part III:

Engraining the Charter for Resilience

In the third part of *FIRE's* award-winning series, Editor Andrew Lynch and Security Correspondent Dr Dave Sloggett identify crucial components of their Charter for Resilience

For those of an anxious disposition regarding apocalyptic scenarios, the Coronavirus crisis has been something of a watershed. Having prepared all their lives for chaos, they have found themselves strangely well prepared for the restrictions of lockdown – previous foreboding replaced by calmness and appreciation that the worst has happened, so let's get on with it.

Governments the world over, meanwhile, are in the maelstrom of frantic decision making fuelled by a history of ignoring past precedents and as a result are in constant action-reaction mode, which must be most stressful.

FIRE's new architecture for society and model of a Charter for Resilience offer a beacon of hope for future preparation and response to major disasters. It comes from a long history of witnessing major disasters, envisaging apocalyptic scenarios and contemplating how to avoid or mitigate their impact in future.

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Dave – Whilst I had worked in UK counter terrorism for many years prior to 9/11, the shock waves emanating from that day nearly 20 years ago had a profound impact on my career. The wider counter terrorism environment saw me travel overseas to see for myself what was happening. The challenges faced by the military force, and nature of sophisticated terror attacks, led me to believe that we would soon see such tactics used in the UK. I believed that preparing for that was essential.

Helping the emergency services be resilient in the aftermath of acts of terrorism became important. That remains the case. Through exercises and lectures I hope to have raised awareness of how command issues require decision making against a dynamically unfolding situation that creates huge command dilemmas.

Deciding when and how to place members of the emergency services at risk, during times when information will be incomplete and often contradictory, is at the heart of the resilience challenge. It is axiomatic that commanders must have dress-rehearsed how they would act under pressure. Immediate resilience lies in the avoidance of command inertia. That is the way that lives are saved. It is the *sine qua non* of why the emergency services exists.

Andrew – 9/11 had a profound effect on the UK Fire Service and I was moved to do everything to support National Resilience starting with the comment in the October 2001 issue: 'We must prepare for this random disorder, accept our society has changed irreparably, but do all we can to mitigate the impact.' In 2004, I co-founded the International Joint Operations Command Conference in Belfast – the first international multi-agency disaster response event.

Since then *FIRE* has held numerous disaster-related conference and events over the years, including most recently our congress on Facing the Terrorist Threat. Interaction with international colleagues has been instrumental in driving forward change and innovative thinking in the field of resilience – working with the Institution of Fire Engineers and producing its journal, *International Fire Professional*, has introduced shared understanding and a world of progressive response in everything from fighting wildfires, responding to widespread flooding and reducing the impact of global threats.

Preparedness and resilience never settle, there is no fixed point of reference – it is an ever-evolving field requiring constant challenge, analysis and rigorous action to counter emerging threats. That is why I believe a new architecture for society is required and a Charter for Resilience to ground that resistance.

Key Considerations

1. Inter-departmental Connectivity
Resilience should be based on all government activity with every department playing its role in ensuring a national response to crisis. It is seen with the Ministry of Defence, for example, helping on floods and during the pandemic. It is a whole society approach geared towards one aim: mitigating loss of life. At the end of the crisis institutional reform needs to happen where it is identified that any department or part of government did not step up to the plate.

2. Challenging Risk
The National Risk Register maintained by the Cabinet Office needs to be reviewed on an annual basis and be challenged by people who are not inside the Whitehall bubble, whilst committee membership be made public outside of the security services. We need rigorous debate on the nature of threats, such as the rise of germs that resist antibiotics.

3. National Lessons Learnt Register
Exercises undertaken to prepare resilience forums should be regional in focus, with an ability to spin off at a local level if the threat is highly localised. Exercises should be scripted according to basic principles and not given to a non-professional person to run the exercises. The structure and approach to exercises, including the detail of how to draw out lessons learnt and feed them into the Cabinet Office and be assured through feedback that those lessons have been taken on board, is essential. We cannot afford to ignore lessons from the likes of Exercise Cygnus as such knowledge drains amount to nothing less than lessons being unlearnt. There needs to be a National Lessons Learnt Register that maintains the national view and compares results from exercises. This needs to be formal and not *ad hoc* as it currently is as this has no formal means of capturing what is important for pre-planning.

4. Environmental Impact
Any response to a future crisis needs to look through the response from an environmental impact viewpoint as a priority, identifying the opportunities to support a green agenda.

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Remote working, for example, now needs to be a formal part of any response to a national emergency, whatever form its takes. Secure infrastructure to support remote working needs to be established, not borrowed in an *ad hoc* fashion from Zoom or whatever the latest video conferencing suite that is available. National Resilience planning needs to have a firm and secure baseline from which to work. That requires a communications infrastructure that supports *ad hoc* remote working for periods of time and where this has an environmental advantage, allows remote working anyway to cut down on travelling time.

5. Equality Impact

Any response to a future crisis should also be viewed through equality impact assessments as evidence is mounting of the impact on black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities being disproportionately affected, accounting for 30 per cent of critically ill Coronavirus patients in hospital. The disproportionate impact on BAME communities could have been foreseen and we need to ensure that when future threats emerge that every step has been taken to protect all sections of the community.

6. Strategic Reserves

Strategic reserves need to be maintained (in storage and replenished where necessary) of a number of key items of equipment. The critical capabilities list, which could include a basic amount of PPE, should be regularly replenished.

7. Engrained Resilience

Engraining the Charter for Resilience in the fabric of society – building resilient, connected communities as outlined in part one's white paper on a five-step reset – will ensure the new architecture for society emboldens leaders and the public to unite around a shared vision for protecting our communities. Building a strong, flexible framework will ensure future governments will be able to respond proactively, step outside the maelstrom of reactive catch-up decision making and respond effectively to the next pandemic or disaster.

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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
- The supporting infrastructure is in place to ensure 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.

A New Architecture for Society

Alongside the considerations above, the 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 engineering 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.
- 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.

FIRE magazine wins best comment for Coronavirus journalism excellence.

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