

The voices of resilience

Jeannie Barr summarises key points arising from the UK Government's call for evidence for its National Resilience Strategy, saying that resilience professionals still need to be placed at the forefront of crisis planning

To paraphrase an old cliché, time and crisis wait for no one. Even as Covid-19 rumbles on, requiring the professional and personal attention of resilience professionals, other disasters and emergencies emerge, which also need attention, action and to be planned for. As resilience professionals, it is our business to be prepared for them.

There were high hopes among the professional community when the UK Government issued a public Call for Evidence to contribute to the shaping of an updated National Resilience Strategy in July 2021. Resilience professionals welcomed the call, hoping that they would have the chance to demonstrate their experience and expertise in preparation for the next, inevitable crisis, despite the government's lack of engagement with them during Covid-19.

Hundreds of individuals and organisations responded, aiming to contribute, share and help the country to be well-prepared.

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

While the full strategy hasn't yet been published – it's expected in spring 2022 – the government has published its consultation outcome. The reaction so far from colleagues in the profession is that it seems to have fallen short of expectations and is even a bit underwhelming.

Underwhelming?

But let's not lose too much hope. This is not the full strategy and the government pledges the responses that it has received have been: "Shared with policy teams." We hope that they become an integral part of the strategy, influencing the overarching objectives of the supporting policies and include measures for accountability and a benchmark for standards at all levels.

So what are the key points and themes? In summary:

- More can be done to assess and communicate risk at national and local levels;
- Greater transparency and accessibility to risk information are needed;
- Everyone should have a part to play in improving the UK's resilience;
- Support for a whole-of-society approach and active partnership from individuals, community and volunteer groups, businesses and academia;
- The US, Australia, New Zealand, Sweden and Japan were cited as examples from which the UK could learn about resilience models;
- Division of roles and responsibilities between central government and devolved administrations, local government and responders could be more tightly defined and have greater co-ordination;
- Critical national infrastructure resilience can be improved further through appropriate resilience standards; and

- More standardisation and consistency across processes and tools are needed for better preparation, mitigation and response to risks.

All are points that I'm sure the majority of resilience professionals would agree with. So far, so good. However, the proof of the pudding is in the eating. Come the spring, when we see the finished strategy, we will be able to judge properly whether the voices of resilience have truly been considered and heard.

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