



NATIONAL **PREPAREDNESS** COMMISSION

JRC Annual Conference 2023: Enabling Enhanced Resilience

Policy, Planning and Preparedness

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About the NPC

Mission:

To support policies and other actions that will make the UK better prepared for major shocks, crises and disruptions.

Working towards (*inter alia*):

- A 'whole of society' model of preparedness
- Government recognition that resilience and national preparedness are of paramount importance
- An approach to risk designed to cope with the scale, pace and entanglement of the threats we face today
- Policies and actions that reduce the likelihood of disruptions occurring and mitigate the effects when they do

The Commission:

- Comprises around 50 senior figures from industry, academia, public life, charity and voluntary sectors
- Has a work programme of major reports, roundtables, brokered discussions and shorter articles
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- ...focused on UK outcomes but with global salience



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Starts with agreement and assumptions:

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- How and when it might happen
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- What should be done

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- What impact that might have ...who and what is affected
- What should be done ...implications of that plan
- What is Plan B...and Plan C?

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Preparedness:

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Preparedness unpacked

Preparedness is 'the state in which [the UK] has the right attitudes, capabilities, information and governance structures to deal with disruptive events – whether foreseen or unexpected.'

Being prepared for:

- Shocks manifesting differently than expected
- Dealing with residual risks (understanding exposure)
- Consequential, cascade, concurrent shocks (systems thinking)
- Known and unknown risks ('threat agnostic', NRR +)



At organisational level:

- Resilience through design
- Mobilising a response
- Making decisions
- Keeping the lights on
- Managing resource, assets and knowledge



What we need from policy

A new mindset:

*'We have normality. I repeat, we have normality.
Anything you still can't cope with is therefore your own problem.'*
(Douglas Adams)

Good policy :

- Supports agility, flexibility and distributed decision-making and not act as a barrier
- Deals with business as usual AND disruption by focussing on what matters
- Is not designed only for ideal conditions or isolated incidents
- Works in multiple timeframes simultaneously
- Works across multiple domains – international, national, regional, local
- Defines accountabilities, authorities and parameters
- Copes with evolving contexts
- Focuses on outcomes – navigation, not control



Challenges for policy-makers

Structures and responsibilities:

- Policy-making in silos or at the wrong scale
- Constraints such as authority, budget or time in office
- Conflicts or divergence – in agendas, priorities, cultures, practices or vocabulary
- Lack of influence or interaction with others on whom you depend

Vulnerable to elephant traps:

- Eating the elephant, one bite at a time
 - Over-specific, policies not designed for complex, evolving contexts (e.g. terrorism insurance)*
- Elephants in the room (things we prefer to ignore)
 - e.g. that communications systems are intrinsic to the transition to energy Net Zero*
- White elephants ('known knowns' that are hard to address)
 - e.g. that the NHS and other public systems are facing a workforce crisis...extra training places aren't enough*
- Describing a whole elephant, whilst knowing only one part
 - e.g. designing rail resilience without understanding the utility of the service to passengers (e.g. wider mobility, job security, connectivity, etc)*



Conclusions

Plans, preparedness and policy are all needed for resilience:

- The environment is complex, turbulent and intricately interconnected
- Continuity plans and risk registers are incredibly useful, but rarely enough
- We need to be prepared for something else to happen...and prepared to act when it does
- Policy's role is to support that imperative and not get in its way. Good policy can be difficult to get right
- A new mindset, embracing uncertainty and systems thinking is essential.

Resilience – at all levels - will happen when:

- We know our purpose and priorities well and can pinpoint what matters
- We know what good looks like, and understand our vulnerabilities
- We know how to grow capability or capacity when needed, and how to pay for it
- We have strong, practised collaboration and decision-making structures
- We have the tools to both navigate uncertainty and to spot – and take – opportunities arising from disruption.

