

# Resilience

Journal of the Emergency Planning Society

Spring 2023



# When a monster comes to town...

[www.the-eps.org](http://www.the-eps.org)

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**EMERGENCY PLANNING SOCIETY**  
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**PRESS RELEASE**

The government is closely monitoring the situation in the wake of the major disaster that has affected the region. Our top priority is to ensure the safety and well-being of all residents. Emergency responders and disaster relief teams have been deployed to the area to provide immediate assistance, including search and rescue operations, food and shelter for those in need, and medical care for the injured.

We are also working closely with local and federal agencies to assess the damage and coordinate a comprehensive response. The government is committed to providing the necessary resources and support to aid in the recovery efforts.

We urge residents to follow the guidance of emergency officials and stay informed about the evolving situation. We will continue to provide updates and additional information as it becomes available.

Our thoughts are with those who have been impacted by this disaster and we will do everything we can to help them get back on their feet.



# EPS Board, PWGs, Nations and Regions - your contacts

Emergency Planning Society  
The Hawkhill,  
York YO61 3EG

Tel: 01347 821972  
info@the-eps.org  
Accounts:  
accounts@the-eps.org

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Acting Chair and Director for Professional Standards & Learning: **Jeannie Barr**  
[PS&L.director@the-eps.org](mailto:PS&L.director@the-eps.org)

Director for Finance: **Peter Cheesman**  
[Finance.Director@the-eps.org](mailto:Finance.Director@the-eps.org)

Vice Chair & Director for Governance: **Stephen Arundell**  
[Director.SA@the-eps.org](mailto:Director.SA@the-eps.org)

**Eran Bauer**  
[Director.EB@the-eps.org](mailto:Director.EB@the-eps.org)

**Gail Rowntree**  
[Director.GR@the-eps.org](mailto:Director.GR@the-eps.org)

## PROFESSIONAL WORKING GROUPS

**CBRNe**  
Joint Chair: **Barry Moss**  
[barry.moss@bwmconsulting.co.uk](mailto:barry.moss@bwmconsulting.co.uk)  
Joint Chair: **Louise Elstow**  
[louise.elstow@fynboslimited.co.uk](mailto:louise.elstow@fynboslimited.co.uk)  
Secretary: **Mark Richardson**  
[mark.richardson@defra.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:mark.richardson@defra.gsi.gov.uk)

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[james.mason@eastriding.gov.uk](mailto:james.mason@eastriding.gov.uk)  
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[Health.PWG@the-eps.org](mailto:Health.PWG@the-eps.org)

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[emma.dodgson@essex.gov.uk](mailto:emma.dodgson@essex.gov.uk)  
Vice Chair: **Elizabeth Tassell**  
[etassell@worcestershires.gov.uk](mailto:etassell@worcestershires.gov.uk)

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[amanda@amandacolemancomms.co.uk](mailto:amanda@amandacolemancomms.co.uk)  
Vice Chair: **Bob Wade**  
[bob@bobwademediamedia.co.uk](mailto:bob@bobwademediamedia.co.uk)

**FLOOD RESILIENCE**  
Chair: **Phil Emonson**  
[Philip.Emonson@jbaconsulting.com](mailto:Philip.Emonson@jbaconsulting.com)  
Vice Chair: **Paul O'Hare**  
[Paul.A.OHare@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:Paul.A.OHare@mmu.ac.uk)  
Secretary: **Shelly Evans**  
[shelley.evans@jbaconsulting.com](mailto:shelley.evans@jbaconsulting.com)

## BRANCHES

**EAST MIDLANDS**  
Chair - Jim Farrell  
[tvaps2@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:tvaps2@yahoo.co.uk)  
Secretary and Lincolnshire Representative - Graeme Hemsall  
[Graeme.Hemsall@lincoln.fire-uk.org](mailto:Graeme.Hemsall@lincoln.fire-uk.org)  
Treasurer - Martin Wilkinson  
[martin@telecomsresilience.com](mailto:martin@telecomsresilience.com)

**EASTERN**  
Interim Branch Chair: Jo Tyler  
[Eastern.branch@the-eps.org](mailto:Eastern.branch@the-eps.org)

**LONDON**  
Contact EPS on:  
[London.region@the-eps.org](mailto:London.region@the-eps.org)

**NORTH WEST**  
Chair - Andrew Swapp  
[andrew.swapp@gmp.police.uk](mailto:andrew.swapp@gmp.police.uk)  
Secretary/Treasurer - Jenny Jones  
[jenny.jones3@lancashire.gov.uk](mailto:jenny.jones3@lancashire.gov.uk)  
Vice Chair - Julie Ferguson  
[Julie.ferguson@lancaster.ac.uk](mailto:Julie.ferguson@lancaster.ac.uk)  
Communications - Rachel Hutchinson  
[Rachel.hutchinson@blackburn.gov.uk](mailto:Rachel.hutchinson@blackburn.gov.uk)  
Events - Bernard Kershaw  
[Bernard.kershaw@cumbria.gov.uk](mailto:Bernard.kershaw@cumbria.gov.uk)  
Social Media Officer - Dharmesh Nayee  
[dharmsh.nayee@lancashire.gov.uk](mailto:dharmsh.nayee@lancashire.gov.uk)

**NORTHERN**  
All officers can be contacted via:  
[info@the-eps.org](mailto:info@the-eps.org)

**NORTHERN IRELAND**  
Secretary - Seth Speirs  
[seth.speirs@ppnsni.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:seth.speirs@ppnsni.gsi.gov.uk)  
Treasurer - Joan McCaffrey  
[joan.mccaffrey@fermanaghomagh.com](mailto:joan.mccaffrey@fermanaghomagh.com)  
PR & Members - Dawn Bowers  
[dawn.bowers@hpe.com](mailto:dawn.bowers@hpe.com)

**REPUBLIC OF IRELAND**  
Branch Executive address: EPS (Republic of Ireland Branch) c/o The Mews 15 Adelaide Street, Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin. Telephone: +353 (1) 280 9410  
Email: [epsroi@gmail.com](mailto:epsroi@gmail.com)

**SCOTLAND**  
All officers can be contacted via the main address:  
[scotland.branch@the-eps.org](mailto:scotland.branch@the-eps.org)  
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Executive Member - Colin McGowan  
Executive Member - Mhairi McGowan

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[kevandjulieclaxton1@sky.com](mailto:kevandjulieclaxton1@sky.com)  
Secretary - Tom Crellin  
[southeastern.branch@the-eps.org](mailto:southeastern.branch@the-eps.org)  
Membership Secretary - Nathan Hazlehurst  
[nathan.hazlehurst1@nhs.net](mailto:nathan.hazlehurst1@nhs.net)  
Events - Richard Highgate  
[richard.highgate@kent.gov.uk](mailto:richard.highgate@kent.gov.uk)  
Executive Member - Steve Scully  
[stephen.scully@kent.gov.uk](mailto:stephen.scully@kent.gov.uk)

**SOUTH WESTERN**  
Chair - Philip West  
[Southwestern.branch@the-eps.org](mailto:Southwestern.branch@the-eps.org)  
Deputy Chair - Vanessa Middlemiss  
[vanessa.middlemiss@phe.gov.uk](mailto:vanessa.middlemiss@phe.gov.uk)  
Secretary - Nicola Dawson  
[Southwestern.branch@the-eps.org](mailto:Southwestern.branch@the-eps.org)  
Treasurer - Caroline Lindsay  
[caroline.lindsay@phe.gov.uk](mailto:caroline.lindsay@phe.gov.uk)  
Membership Secretary and Web & Comms - Damien MacDonald  
[Damien.macdonald@nhs.net](mailto:Damien.macdonald@nhs.net)  
County Representatives  
Avon - Bill Crocker  
[bill.crocker@delegatedservices.org](mailto:bill.crocker@delegatedservices.org)  
Cornwall - Caroline Wildish  
[Caroline.WILDISH@devonandcornwall.pnn.police.uk](mailto:Caroline.WILDISH@devonandcornwall.pnn.police.uk)  
Devon - Debbie Brooker-Evans  
[evans@plymouth.gov.uk](mailto:evans@plymouth.gov.uk)  
Dorset - Caroline Lindsay  
[caroline.lindsay@phe.gov.uk](mailto:caroline.lindsay@phe.gov.uk)  
Gloucestershire - Ian Goodyear  
[ian.goodyear@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:ian.goodyear@environment-agency.gov.uk)  
Somerset - Allan Ball  
[Tripped-sandbag-0m@icloud.com](mailto:Tripped-sandbag-0m@icloud.com)  
Wiltshire - Vanessa Middlemiss  
[vanessa.middlemiss@phe.gov.uk](mailto:vanessa.middlemiss@phe.gov.uk)

**WALES**  
All officers can be contacted via the main address:  
[wales.branch@the-eps.org](mailto:wales.branch@the-eps.org)  
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[Claire.wise@networkrail.co.uk](mailto:Claire.wise@networkrail.co.uk)  
Vice Chair - Jawaid Akhtar  
[jawaid\\_akhtar@birmingham.gov.uk](mailto:jawaid_akhtar@birmingham.gov.uk)  
Secretary - Libby Tassell  
[etassell@worcestershires.gov.uk](mailto:etassell@worcestershires.gov.uk)  
Members - Lianne Deathridge  
[Lianne.deathridge@walsall.gov.uk](mailto:Lianne.deathridge@walsall.gov.uk)  
Members - Andrea Davies  
[Andrea.davies@eaststaffsbc.gov.uk](mailto:Andrea.davies@eaststaffsbc.gov.uk)  
Members - Peter Streets  
[Peter.streets999@btinternet.com](mailto:Peter.streets999@btinternet.com)  
Members - Steve Webb  
[Sjw.1@talktalk.net](mailto:Sjw.1@talktalk.net)  
Members - Mike Enderby  
[menderby@birmingham.gov.uk](mailto:menderby@birmingham.gov.uk)

**YORKSHIRE & THE HUMBER**  
Chair - Katie Speed  
[katie.speed1@nhs.net](mailto:katie.speed1@nhs.net)  
Deputy Chair - Darren Nugent  
[daznugent@sky.com](mailto:daznugent@sky.com)  
Secretary - Reuben McGarry  
[Reuben.mcgarry@york.gov.uk](mailto:Reuben.mcgarry@york.gov.uk)  
Treasurer - Jonathan Brown  
[Jonathan.brown@eastriding.gov.uk](mailto:Jonathan.brown@eastriding.gov.uk)  
Events - Wendy Muldoon  
[Wendy.muldoon@northyorks.gov.uk](mailto:Wendy.muldoon@northyorks.gov.uk)

**INTERNATIONAL**  
Contact EPS Head Office at [info@the-eps.org](mailto:info@the-eps.org)



## Resilience

Spring 2023 issue

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Resilience is produced by:  
Bob Wade Media Ltd,  
Sutton Coldfield B73 5SS

Co. Reg. 07469245  
Tel: 0121 354 8223 |  
07950 155008

bob@bobwademediaco.uk

## memo

WELCOME to your Spring Edition of *Resilience*. It has already been a very busy few months, and there has been many developments, so let's catch up on the latest:

**EPS Website:** The EPS website has encountered a number of difficulties which sadly proved difficult to resolve. The EPS Board recently undertook a tender exercise to source a new supplier to develop a new website. We are pleased to announce we have appointed *Simplicity Marketing* to undertake the redevelopment of the EPS website.

Work to redevelop the site is underway and we will provide regular updates on the projected timescale for completion and launch. Any members interested in being involved in the development work, please let us know at [info@the.org](mailto:info@the.org) – for those of you who previously voiced an interest, we will be in touch to arrange a meeting.

**Microsoft Teams:** We are setting up basic *Office 365* accounts for branches, PWGs, and committees. This will provide access to an EPS email address, Teams and Shared Drives. This will ensure we continue to be compliant with GDPR and that all activities are kept within the secure EPS environment.

**New members:** I am happy to say over the first quarter of 2023 our membership has been growing steadily, in spite of the issues with the website, with a significant number of new recruits. Please join me in welcoming all our new members to the EPS.

**AGM & NOC:** After consultation with the National Operational Committee, the AGM will likely be held virtually again this year, in September.

On NOC, we give a big thank you to **Andy McCombe** for all his hard work, after standing down as Chair at the end of 2022 – we wish him well in his retirement, although I am sure we will still be seeing Andy in the EPS in other roles.

**PWGs:** Several of our Professional Working Groups are working closely with other organisations and professional bodies, to produce Guidance.

**Covid Inquiry:** the EPS submitted a draft corporate statement in February to the Covid Inquiry, and this was followed up with a supporting statement from members. Thanks to everyone who contributed, and to **Matt**, **Bev** and **Gail** who facilitated the drop-in sessions and put together the members' statement.

**Emergencies Resilience Professional Apprenticeship Standard:** I am happy to report this has received approval and should be ready for August 2024, and is awaiting final confirmation of funding band by the Department for Education.

**Inactive branches:** We will be sending out surveys to members from inactive branches to identify how they would like to move forward. Please look out for this survey, or alternatively please email [info@the-eps.org](mailto:info@the-eps.org) with any ideas you may have.



■ Acting Chair,  
Jeannie Barr

**Members Updates:** Please continue to look out for the 'Members Updates' – these are regularly emailed to you: if you are not receiving these please let us know, although don't forget to check your junk folder first, or if you have unsubscribed. And don't forget – as part of your membership, you are entitled to a subscription for *Crisis Response Journal*, and we now have also organised a members' subscription to the *Emergency Services Times*.

\* \* \*

And finally, our **30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations**. A planning group has been meeting to plan events - see page 4.

These celebrations will culminate at our annual conference to be held on the **7 - 8 November**, with an awards ceremony along with a 'bit of a do' to celebrate our first live event for a few years. Our awards this year will focus on you our members, and we will be looking for nominations from you. More information to follow.

We are also looking for nominations for Fellows (members) and Honorary Fellows (non-members), as we would like to award 30 in total at this year's event. Fellow and Honorary Fellow is bestowed upon an individual in recognition of their outstanding and significant contributions in the emergency planning and resilience sector, or their role in the EPS.

We will also be celebrating our anniversary at the *Emergency Services Show* on **19 – 20 September** at the NEC Birmingham, partnering with them in their new 'resilience and recovery zone' including contributing to the programme of speakers, as well as a dedicated EPS 'networking lounge' for members and guests, along with our stand. Similarly, we will also be partnering with the *International Security Expo* on **26 – 27 September** in London, with an exhibition and speakers, and a display of EPS legacy items. If any members local to Birmingham or London are able to help out on the stands etc, please let us know.

So very busy times, and all that on top of the day job. The emergency planning profession has never been more needed, and you all continue to work in difficult circumstances with limited resources, achieving miracles every day. A big thank you to you all.

## Dates announced for key trade shows

### 25-27 April:

*The Security Event*  
NEC Birmingham

- Showcase for the leading security brands, displaying the latest products, technologies and solutions.

[www.thesecurityevent.co.uk](http://www.thesecurityevent.co.uk)

### 16 – 18 May:

*FIREX*  
ExCeL London

- The UK's fire prevention, detection and protection event

[www.firex.co.uk](http://www.firex.co.uk)

### 6 – 8 June:

*Flood & Coast*  
Telford International Centre

- For all practitioners involved in the impacts of climate change on flood and coastal erosion risk management, produced by CIWEM in partnership with the Environment Agency, The Rivers Trust and Association of SuDS Authorities.

[www.ciwem.org/events/flood-and-coast-conference-and-exhibition-2023](http://www.ciwem.org/events/flood-and-coast-conference-and-exhibition-2023)

### 15 June:

*Fire Safety Matters Live,*  
Coventry Building Society Arena.

- One day conference with presentations including the Building Safety Regulator and the Fire Industry Association.

[www.fsatters.com](http://www.fsatters.com)

### 19-20 September:

*The Emergency Services Show*  
NEC Birmingham.

- The leading event in the blue light sector, with stands from 500+ leading suppliers.

[www.emergencyuk.com](http://www.emergencyuk.com)

### 27 - 28 September:

*International Security Expo*  
London Olympia

- The Expo provides an important link between Government, industry, academia and the entire end-user community, strengthening the relationships that are essential to improving safety and security.

[www.internationalsecurityexpo.com](http://www.internationalsecurityexpo.com)

# EPS gears up for 30th Anniversary celebrations



THIS year sees the 30th anniversary of the formation of the Emergency Planning Society.

A key event as part of the celebrations will be the EPS 30th Anniversary National Conference and Awards, to be held on **7 - 8 November**.

First formed in 1993, the EPS is the professional association for those working in the resilience and emergency response sector. For the past 30 years it has drawn upon the expertise of its multi-disciplinary membership to provide independent, expert advice to key decision making bodies, including Government departments and Parliament.

Alongside the National Conference, a series of events have been planned,

including:

- A special 30th anniversary adornment to the EPS logo.
- Features and recorded interviews with Fellows and members of the EPS examining significant incidents and events, changes in the profession and professional memories of resilience.
- A National EPS Awards celebrating achievements in the profession
- Opportunities to purchase vintage and current EPS memorabilia
- A programme of educational events and learning opportunities
- A series of authored articles from EPS members appearing in publications including *The Crisis Response Journal*

If you would like to contribute to the 30th Anniversary celebrations, be interviewed as part of the 'Anniversary Interviews' series or be part of the planning committee, please contact [info@the-eps.org](mailto:info@the-eps.org)

**EPS 2023 National Conference**  
**7 - 8 November**

## Covid - 19 Public Inquiry gets underway

FOLLOWING the submission of a draft corporate statement by the EPS to the Covid-19 Public Inquiry, the Society was offered the opportunity to provide a supporting statement from members.

This was collated with a series of 'drop-in' online sessions held in March, and submitted.

For the Inquiry itself, 'Module 1' - the first investigation examining the UK's pandemic preparedness - is now underway.

The Chair of the Inquiry, Baroness Heather Hallett, has ruled that the Inquiry will begin hearing evidence for its first investigation, on **Tuesday 13 June**. The hearings will take place over six weeks, and will conclude on **Friday 21 July**.



'NCSR+ Manchester' - enhancing societal resilience

THE National Conference on Societal Resilience was held in Manchester in March, bringing together partners from policy and practice from across UK to share insights, learn together, and identify opportunities on how to enhance societal resilience.

Known as 'NCSR+', the Consortium was established 'to enhance the UK[+] whole-of-society approach to resilience, so that individuals, community groups, businesses, and organisations can all play a meaningful part in building the resilience of our society'.

Founded and co-chaired by Alliance Manchester Business School and Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum (LRF), membership of the consortium includes almost all local authorities in the UK along with key resilience partners.

Speakers included leading policymakers, practitioners, and resilience experts from multiple sectors, with keynote speeches by **Mary Jones**, Resilience Director, UK Cabinet Office, and **Colin Payne**, Head of Strategy, Resilience and Recovery Directorate (RED), at the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

One of the group discussions, titled 'How should you discuss risks with society?' was led by Lesley Speedie, Chair of the Blackwood and Kirkmuirhill Resilience Group in South Lanarkshire.

We reproduce here an article she wrote on Community Recovery following the Pandemic, an issue facing community resilience groups up and down the country:

# Recovery - the silent sister of resilience

By **Leslie Speedie**  
Blackwood & Kirkmuirhill  
Community Resilience

What are we doing now? What are we recovering from? Where do we start? Is the answer to COVID community recovery buried in community development?

It has been a while since I wrote a blog or an article, I think the absence from writing reflects the mental blockage faced when trying to define community recovery and the direction of the group.

Back in March 2020 myself and others in the team threw some ideas around the room regarding the name of our newly formed COVID-19 community response group. 'Resilience' was the obvious noun to drop into the title along with Blackwood and Kirkmuirhill. The word may be overly used in corporate buzz-word bingo, but the term resilience in its truest sense is to spring back from adversity: it captured the essence of everything we set out to do, respond to and recover from COVID-19.

In the world of emergency planning, the cheesy strapline 'recovery starts with a good response' is often thrown around by instructors, facilitators, and consultants and now, adopted by us and applied to everything we do... we do cheese very well!

## What are we recovering from?

AS with any crisis or disaster, when the typical emotions of anxiety and the sense of "togetherness in adversity" subside, when the blue light agencies have been forgotten, when the hero badges and facebook likes have all been overtaken and replaced with the next wave of sensationalist news, what remains is the often unseen and unspoken silent sister, recovery.

When the adrenaline levels have returned to normal, when people are facing emotional and empathy fatigue and the masses are crying out for the old ways to return, the long slog of recovery can often be underestimated and less supported.

Combined with a lack of appetite for the subject matter, the masses will dust themselves down, pick up where they left off and proceed with getting on with



Painted stones for a wall, a project for children in the villages during the Pandemic

**'When the adrenaline levels have returned to normal, when people are facing emotional and empathy fatigue, the long slog of recovery can often be under-estimated and less supported'**



LESLEY SPEEDIE is the full time Crisis Management Lead at SSE Renewables and is currently the Chairperson of Blackwood and Kirkmuirhill Resilience Group.

Lesley started her career in the Army with the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers at the age of 16, hoping to be part of international response operations.

After several operational tours in the Middle East, and a stint Lesley as a fire-fighter during the UK national Fire Service strikes, she later left forces to pursue new volunteering opportunities with various charities around the world.

On returning to the UK, Lesley then went on to work in a community development role building community resilience within areas of destitution and social inequalities. Upon completion of the community project, Lesley began a new career in the private sector with SSER.

Throughout the COVID-19 Pandemic, Lesley acted as the chairperson of a local community response group. Using her crisis management knowledge, she lead a team of volunteers to set up a response model, a transition model and a recovery model.



# Community recovery (Con.)

life. Meanwhile, others most affected by the event continue to crawl, limp and feel their way along trying to navigate this new sense of 'normality'.

As a team we have tried to define what recovery is to our community, and how does a constituted community group influence and promote community recovery?

### Defining the question

COVID recovery is a tangled mess of mental health, physical health, social wellbeing, and economic insecurity. Our National Health Service staff continue to battle on through exhaustion trying to fire fight the endless back-logs of patient appointments, treatment and operations. Many have joined the herd and took flight with the 'mass resignation' after a lockdown epiphany moment woke them up to a new purpose in life.

On top of the COVID-19 recovery cake, smear a thick layer of BREXIT 'cream' [replace 'cream' with an adjective of your own choosing] and then sprinkle a fine dusting of COP26 climate change. The question is no longer about how a constituted group springs back and recovers from COVID, but more so, how does a community group navigate the complexities of the above ensuring that when the recovery cake is baked, our community comes out the other end, healthier, better and stronger.

Pondering the question further, before COVID-19 raised its head, what was the good, the bad and the ugly in our villages? And do we want to go back to that, or do we want something better, is now the time for change, even radical change?

### Finding the starting point

OVER the last 30 years the village suspension has been rumbled by the shock of de-industrialization, the closing down of the Atlas factory, Hy-Scott factory, Delta factory and Birkwood hospital, who were all big local employers. Social pubs and clubs have declined, and local sports teams have frizzled out as the village transitioned from an old mining community to a commuting village.

Some of the areas have absorbed the shock and sprung back, but other areas of the village have been left behind, falling into deprivation, and experiencing the hardships of inequalities. Like the COVID cake analogy



■ The community got together to make a wall for the village of stones painted by the children as part of their lock-down project

above, we are also faced with another layer of tasty goodness – the rural issue. Access to services, transport links and so forth can bring with it further limitations, hindering and adding more weight to the challenges people face.

It's no longer about recovery from COVID, its now about a journey that requires the navigation of the pot-hole riddled roads of BREXIT and the pathway to Net-Zero post COP26 planet. If we don't get this right, the community suspension will feel the shock and rumbles of what lays ahead, and while many parts of the village will absorb the shocks and spring back as they have shown to do in the past, other areas of the village could fall behind again.

*Even simple questions such as:*

- How will people in four-in-a-block flats be able to charge their electric cars when we move away from fossil fuel?
- With the new world of home working, how will people with poor IT skills / broadband connection be able to keep-up with O365, Windows 10 and soon to be Windows 11? (*remember the drama when you switched from Windows 7 to 10?*)
- How can we raise more awareness about single use plastics and switching to sustainability? Can people afford the switch from plastic bottled milk to glass bottled milk?
- How do you prepare people for a future of digital tech, AI and algorithms, innovation,

and a pace of change much faster than what we have ever experienced?

How do communities keep up with change?

### Community planting

OVER the weekend we will be out and about planting Daffodil bulbs - in the world of emergency management one could be forgiven for being rather cynical about the connection between planting bulbs and community recovery. But, planting bulbs today brings people together, creates a sense of ownership and promotes community engagement, and in 3 – 4 months, that delayed gratification will be felt as we come out the winter months to a sea of brightness.

For a community still limping along in a state of social decline, small positive interactions applied consistently over time is the social physiotherapy rehab prescription. Little by a little, building up confidence, building up community ownership, building up a sense of pride, building a sense of belonging and purpose as we move from a reactive state to a pro-active state and build back better.

To quote the Chinese social philosopher 'Confucius': "The man who moves a mountain begins by carrying away small stones."

Over the coming weeks and months, you can expect to see more from our resilience group, we are looking forward to partnering with other groups and organisations to help bring lasting change to our wee villages. ■

# Comms webinar - chatting about ChatBots

The Communications Professional Working Group had its first webinar for members at the end of January, attended by over 60 EPS members.

The subject was the blight of 'Disinformation' and fake news, but also an introduction to the world of 'social listening'.

The global pandemic saw disinformation transform from being a nuisance in terms of emergency management, into now having tangible impacts - the storming of Capitol Hill, the mass numbers of unvaccinated, and the war in Ukraine.

**Bob Wade**, Vice Chair of the Communications PWG explained the history of disinformation, from Britain's 'Sibs' during World War II to the 'Black Boomerangs' of today.

He said the way being developed to combat disinformation was the model urged by the US based Centre for European Policy Analysis, which included:

- Social resilience
- a growing network of disinformation detectors – fact checkers
- social media companies (responsive to public and legislative pressure) that constrict disinformation on their platforms
- an informed media that exposes disinformation
- potentially at a next stage, a regulatory framework that seeks to filter out inauthentic and deceptive behaviour.

**Steph Makins**, founder of *Pollywiggie Web Design & Marketing Solutions* outlined what 'social listening' means, and how to use it to look at what others say and then analysing the results to understand why they are making those comments.



Steph Makins

She outlined a whole host platforms that can be used, and intro-

Don Kettl



Disinformation has transformed from being a nuisance to having tangible impacts on events, from the anti-vax campaigns to the storming of Capitol Hill.

duced the audience to the world of 'SEO', which stands for search engine optimization (see next page). In business and marketing, SEO is the practice of improving your online visibility in organic search results to increase the quantity and quality of your website traffic.

**Prof. Don Kettl**, who specializes in public management and public policy, and who previously served as dean in the School of Public Policy at the University of Maryland, and more recently at the University of Texas, and gave the US perspective on disinformation, but then explained about the new world of 'ChatBots'.

A chatbot is a program that uses artificial intelligence (AI) and natural language processing (NLP) to understand customer questions and automate responses to them.

He stunned everybody by producing a press release using a ChatBot, where the only information he fed in was the need for a community to evacuate in the face of an approaching storm. The ChatBot produced a press release, a tweet and an 'after report', all in 20 seconds!

Don showed the press release to the audience and all agreed, aside from the odd tweak here and there, it was ready to go with good warning

**'Don Kettl stunned everyone by using a ChatBot to produce a press release about an evacuation in the face of an approaching storm, within 20 seconds'**

and informing information within it. You could take a few seconds longer to add names, places, hashtags etc, but you could have such material produced in seconds.

In terms of ChatBots being used to spread authentic looking disinformation, Don pointed out there was a new bot – called *Open AI* – that can be used to check to see if text was written by a bot.

As Don commented on the new phenomenon of ChatBots: "You can decide if it is a good thing or a bad thing. Whatever it is, it's a thing and its here."

The 'press release' Don produced on a ChatBot in 20 seconds



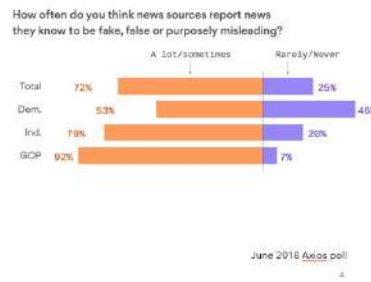
# 'Disinformation affects perceptions of risk'

DON in his presentation explained how disinformation had weakened people's trust in the mainstream media. This in turn was coloured by 'partisan affiliation' in the USA.

A survey by the the Axios polling group in 2018 asked 'how often do you think news sources report news they know to be fake, false or purposely misleading?'. Over 70 per cent said 'a lot' or 'sometimes'. Only 25 per cent believed the media would never or rarely do this.

The results were more stark when they were broken down into political affiliation -

Who believes what depends on partisan affiliation



72 per cent of Democrats were mistrustful of the media, while for Republicans, it was a staggering 92 per cent.

Don explained this was dangerous for emergency responders in getting the public to take action to make themselves safe, as

he said:

- Information and disinformation affect trust
- Trust affects perception of risk
- Perceptions of risk shape behaviour



At the webinar, Steph Makins listed a whole host of platforms that can be used to monitor social media traffic so you can understand what the public are thinking and may be acting upon, which is important for emergency planners and responders dealing with major incidents, and to help gauge how to respond to public anxieties.

Here's the list – some have been around for some time such as Tweetdeck or Hootsuite, but there are many others that many of us will have heard of for the first time.

Here they are:

- Tweetdeck
- Reddit
- Hootsuite
- BrandMentions
- Boardreader
- Google Alerts
- Google Trends
- Mention
- Answer the Public

## The tools out there for you to use

*The Editor adds:* "I tried out Answer the Public and you can see how it could be a useful tool to look at public reaction and the issues that concerned them, during or after an incident.

"As an experiment, on 20 March I fed in 'emergency planning'. It gave me the top eight subjects that were being discussed across the social media platforms around the issue of emergency planning:"

- 1 emergency planning for schools. This was the top issue, perhaps not surprisingly given that on that day there would have been much discussion about the impact of strikes by teaching unions on schools.
- 2 emergency planning for schools in Kent. The discussions about the impact of the above in this county must have been particularly intense.
- 3 Environmental emergencies.
- 4 Emergency planning for businesses.
- 5 Water and waste-water utilities.
- 6 Emergency planning for the home.
- 7 Emergency planning for child-care provision.
- 8 Earthquakes: presumably the ongoing activity around the situation in Turkey and Syria.

So a useful tool that can give a quick snapshot at a given moment on what the outside world is thinking about.



# COMMONWEALTH GAMES 2022 *'Inside the machine'*



HOW do you plan resilience when your city is selected for the largest event it has ever faced? *Resilience* spoke to MICHAEL ENDERBY, Head of Resilience at Birmingham City Council, on how they prepared for the Commonwealth Games 2022, despite a limited timescale and a Pandemic thrown in as well...

# More than just a sporting event

Michael Enderby took up his new post as Head of Resilience at Birmingham City Council – the largest local authority in England – in April 2018, only a few months after the surprise news that Birmingham had won the bid for the 2022 Commonwealth Games.

The original bid had been awarded to Durban in South Africa. But in 2017 the Commonwealth Games Federation removed the bid, after South Africa missed crucial deadlines and faced growing economic problems.

Instead, the bid was awarded to Birmingham, leaving it only four years to prepare: “It was a huge international event and we had only four years rather than the usual seven to prepare,” said Michael.

The event would see Birmingham hosting 6,500 athletes and officials from 72 Commonwealth nations and territories, competing in 11 days of sport. More than one million fans would be visiting events across the West Midlands, from Cannock Chase to Coventry. It would be the largest sporting event ever to be held in the West Midlands.

Michael said: “Although branded as the ‘Birmingham’ Commonwealth games, it actually had a much wider footprint.

“While the West Midlands obviously bore the brunt of events, there was also involvement because of the location of some key sports events in Warwickshire, Staffordshire, West Mercia and, because of the use of the Velodrome, London.

“You must also remember the Commonwealth Games is not just about two weeks of sport. Pre and post event, there are numerous build-up events like the baton relay, as well as festivals and cultural events that all have to be delivered safely.”



■ More than 6,500 athletes and officials arrived in the city for the event

# Getting the organisation right



■ The Commonwealth Games was not just ‘11 days of sport’ - there were numerous events, pre and post event

Michael said: “We formed a multi-agency Games resilience group, that ran from mid-2018 right up to the Games itself. Given the size of the event, for the Games resilience group we had to take a multi-agency approach: it was more the case of who *wasn't* on it!”

The Resilience group, calling itself the ‘B2022 Resilience Group’, initially established over 160 risk areas specific to the Games. From this they established six key overarching key areas:

- Concurrent threats
- Cyber attack
- Voluntary resources
- Activity and burn-out – there was concern that amongst resilience practitioners that after 18 months of intense activity around Covid (see next page), could it rise to the challenge of another major event?
- Supply chain – would issues around Brexit and then the war in Ukraine impact the Games? (continued) ▶



## Getting the organisation right (con.)

● Utility and Service provision – as if to emphasise this area, only weeks before the Games were due to start at the end of July, new fuel protests erupted around the country’s petrol stations over fuel costs, although fortunately dissipated before the Games began.

Michael said: “There was very little we hadn’t covered in our risk assessment. You cannot get it one hundred per cent perfect, but we saw a lot of what could be coming.”

Moving forward, between 2019-2020 they established a Safety Advisory Group alongside the B2022 Resilience Group, which in turn oversaw the work of the local SAGs established for the different sporting venues across the Commonwealth Games footprint.

Given the huge size of the task, not everyone can come to the table so they adopted the ‘LRF Brigade’ principle: “The core principle was that each partner had responsibility for reporting back decisions to their

respective LRFs or organisation.”

It was also agreed who the lead agencies would be for each issue – for example, with agreement of the other police forces, it was agreed West Midlands police would lead on all police issues that arose.

In terms of resources, there was a lot brought in for the event itself, which included event management. But Michael added: “in terms of emergency response, we still had the same resources. Indeed, that became a key issue and we spent a lot of time exploring how many concurrent events would we be able to deal with in our normal day to day activities, what was our threshold? How much of our ‘own smoke’ could we be able to consume as the Games were underway?”

For issues like this they needed to assess risk. “We needed a ‘Community Risk Register’ for the Games. You do not re-invent the wheel, we used the model of the Na-

**‘There was very little we hadn’t covered in our risk assessment. You cannot get it one hundred per cent perfect, but we saw a lot of what could be coming’**

tional Risk Assessment model and spent some time looking at the risks to resilience around the Games – what is it going to bring to us?”

A Games Risk Register was established, and from this the Register was used to assess the readiness of all partners. Periodically they would carry out a self-assessment against these risks, using the model of the government’s National Capabilities Survey. They did regular ‘Games capabilities surveys’ and Michael says they were pleased that they always got a one hundred per cent return from all partners.

The returns in turn were peer reviewed, and as Michael said: “It was a great collective effort and it gave us confidence to feel ‘yes, we’ve got this covered’.”

## And then came Covid...

Then came the pandemic. Michael said: “For resilience practitioners, the world changes, and there has to be a one hundred percent focus on keeping central services going and being operationally active.

“At the same time as the pandemic continued, we did have to start thinking about how this could impact the Games, what measures would we put in place, could it continue and if so in what form?

“The Games people kept going while we focused on Covid. But from the resilience side, we didn’t ‘lose 18 months’ because of all the organisational investment we had already put in since 2018.

“Of course, the other big issue about Covid was that we had to change the way we worked. We had been having face to face meetings up until 2020, and that was beneficial as we all got to know each other – that’s very important. So that helped when we had to go virtual, with all meetings going over to Teams, followed by hybrid working.

“But it did work and we delivered the Games. It shows that with having good competence, positive actions and working in partnership, you can deliver what you need to deliver. Knowing each other well pays dividends.”



■ The Games attracted over a million visitors

**‘We needed a ‘Community Risk Register’ for the Games. You do not re-invent the wheel, we used the model of the National Risk Assessment and spent some time looking at the risks to resilience around the Games – what is it going to bring to us?’**

# What's different when a major event is international?

'International sporting events are like a huge machine. As the event gets closer the machine gets faster and faster'.

Michael said: "International sporting events such as the Commonwealth Games are like a huge machine. As the event gets closer the machine gets faster and faster."

"There is a huge transient industry that follows all the big international sports events around the globe, and that come and go at various stages of delivery of the event. At the same time, as the event gets nearer you find more and more people are getting interested and involved in it, which can be both helpful but also challenging."

"While the resilience team are the constant, this can mean a continual state of flux around you."

"One of the big challenges in terms of resilience was working with international teams from all parts of the globe. The UK starts from a good and robust starting point, given our Civil Contingencies and resilience structure, and high levels of safety at sports grounds."

"Many other of the participating countries do not have this level, while as we all know 'resilience' means different things to different people. You must not assume teams from other parts of the world are aware of our practices or understand them, and there can be a desire by some to try and 're-invent the wheel'."

"You have to accept that with the state of flux that can occur with different groups getting involved at different times, lines do get blurred at times. You just have to embrace that and work with it."



■ Alongside crowd safety and security, there was widescale disruption to transport

## Success delivered

The Commonwealth Games themselves passed off without incident. The anticipated one million fans came and went, while for a short while Birmingham was under the global spotlight, with an estimated global television audience of 1.5 billion.

40,000 people benefited from new jobs created by the Games or were amongst the thousands of volunteers who facilitated this mass influx into the city.

Michael said: "While the Games passed off with no incidents, obviously Birmingham and the West Midlands is a major conurbation and we had all the usual 'day to day stuff'."

"But we knew that we could manage that, because we had done the work to know our threshold."

"In terms of the Games themselves, our preparations paid off, and all our work was rewarded by the safe and successful delivery of the Games." ■

## Hurrah! A home is found for the Bull

■ A BIG hit at the Commonwealth Games was the scrap metal bull, used in the spectacular opening ceremony.

After the Games however, Birmingham came close to revolution when it was announced that poor old bully was going back to the scrap yard.

Fortunately wise heads soon prevailed, and the bull remains alive and well, and will be taking centre place in Birmingham's New Street Station Grand Central plaza in September





# JUMPING HURDLES



## The complex world of delivering international aid

THE distressing pictures of the recent earthquake in Turkey and Syria saw an outpouring of sympathy for the victims. But many of the public do not understand that delivering aid is not a simple question of filling an aircraft full of supplies and sending it on its way.

It is a complex world where aid organisations have to navigate the geo-political backdrop, cultural and political sensitivities, diplomacy, international co-ordination and plain old bureaucracy.

BOB WADE looks at the recent earthquakes to explain why.



THE death toll from the 7.8 magnitude earthquake that struck south east Turkey and north west Syria on 6 February is now approaching 53,000.

Getting international aid to disaster struck areas is difficult at the best of times, but the political situation in Turkey and the continuing conflict in Syria has obviously impacted the emergency response.

In Turkey, there is a government still very nervous after the 2016 attempted military coup and a tradition of slack building regulations, while Syria is hampered by the international geo-political situation.

**Bob Wade** is Vice Chair of the Comms PWG. He is a crisis communications consultant and trainer, and has worked regularly on Foreign & Commonwealth Development Office exercises



been replaced by strong supporters of the government.

Nasuh Mahruki had to resign as head of AKUT last year after he was charged with ‘insulting’ the government, and replaced instead by a government supporter.

AFAD meanwhile had been led since 2017 by Mehmet Güllüoğlu, a qualified doctor and a former head for five years of the Turkish Red Crescent. However, in 2020 he was appointed Ambassador to Tanzania. There was much criticism in Turkey of the new leadership appointments to head-up AFAD, who were firm supporters of the ruling government party, the AKP, but had little emergency response or disaster management experience.

In January, İsmail Palakoğlu, was appointed the head of AFAD’s Disaster Intervention Directorate (having been Deputy Head since 2018) – he is a theologian who graduated from a religious vocational high school who previously managed the government’s Directorate of Religious Affairs.

Following much public and international pressure after the earthquake, the government has recalled Mehmet Güllüoğlu from Tanzania, to help with the disaster response.

However, it is still nervous of mobilizing the military fully, and the day after the quake, only 7,500 troops were deployed, with veterans of the 1999 earthquake saying that the military response back then was much larger and faster. Nasuh Mahruki said: “If you’re talking about a disaster ... you have to use the greatest and strongest muscle first, which is the army” (1).

**‘The Turkish government was rocked by a serious military coup attempt in 2016, and ever since has been nervous about mobilising the military’**

## Turkey - government sensitivities mires emergency response

Turkey realised it had an inadequate emergency response infrastructure after the 1999 earthquake, which left 17,000 killed and quarter of a million homeless.

The emergency response was heroic, with a hodgepodge of NGOs such as the Turkish

Red Crescent and the mountain search and rescue organisation AKUT working in tandem with the military. But clearly, a better co-ordinated and more formal emergency response arrangement was needed. This call was championed by the popular co-founder of AKUT, Nasuh Mahruki.

AFAD, the ‘Afet ve Acil Durum Yönetimi Başkanlığı’, (Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency) was eventually established in 2009, based on the US FEMA model.

However, the government of Recep Erdogan was rocked by a serious military coup attempt in 2016, and is now nervous about mobilising the military, while many resilience professionals within AFAD have



Scenes from the devastation in Turkey



## The dangers posed by 'construction pardons'

The other issue that has received much media attention is the lack of earthquake proof buildings in Turkey despite the known risk.

The *Sunday Times* reported: "According to 2020 data from the (Turkish) Environment and Urban Ministry, about half of the buildings in Turkey were built in violation of seismic regulations" (2).

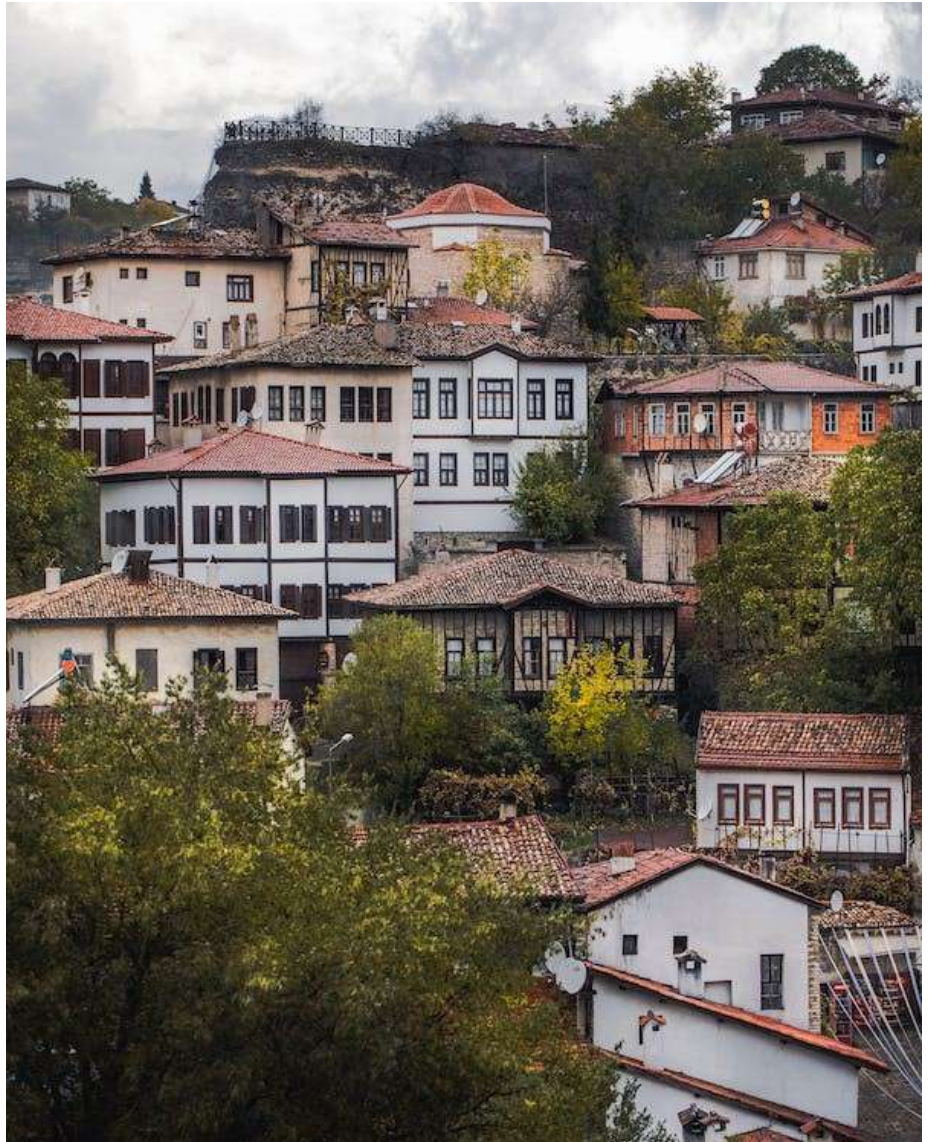
Unfortunately, this is not a new problem, but is part of the political make-up of Turkey where 'construction pardons' are a common tool for politicians to win votes – under these pardons, illegally built, unlicensed properties can get an amnesty in return for simply paying a fine.

This is not a new phenomenon. Since the modern Turkish state was established in 1923, successive governments and dictatorships have decreed 23 reconstruction pardons, although a third of that number have been granted since Erdogan took power. It is a political device that has escalated since the industrialisation boom in Turkey in the 1950s.

People from villages flocked to urban centres for the better paid factory work, but they had to solve their housing needs themselves. With this, enormous pressure was on to open publicly owned land as building plots, with successive governments and authorities turning a blind eye to the *de facto* occupation of public land for use as small building plots, which began to mushroom.

The unauthorised housing is known as *gecekondu* (which means 'built overnight'). But this mass migration into the cities caused another issue - the mass movement of people changed voting behaviour, and politicians of all persuasions began to award title-deeds, set up utility services, and accepted the *gecekondu* into the recognised housing fold through 'amnesties' declared for illegal construction, in the contest for votes.

A further issue is that the *gecekondu*, and indeed many 'mainstream' structures, mostly used sand taken from the salty sea



■ Under the 'construction pardons', illegally built properties can get an amnesty. According to 2020 data, around half of the buildings in Turkey are in violation of seismic regulation

to make concrete, giving the structure a shorter life span as eventually the salt content led to the corrosion of support structures and their separation from the load-bearing concrete, leaving them far from earthquake resilient.

The latest construction pardon issued by the Erdogan government in 2018, benefitted seven and a half million illegal constructions.

Building safety has now become a major political issue, with construction professionals and local planning authorities attempting to block unsafe developments. However, as the *Foreign Policy* publication pointed out in 2013: "Yet in every case, the government has run roughshod over the projects' opponents in a dismissive manner, asserting that anyone who does not like what is taking place should remember how popular the AKP has been when elections roll around" (3).

Criticising the government can be dangerous. Last year, two leading critics of construction policies, Tayfun Kahraman, Chair of

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**'The industrial boom since the 1950s has drawn people into the cities for work, but there was a shortage of housing, so people took over unoccupied plots and built their own homes, known as *gecekondu* - which means 'built overnight'**

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## Construction pardons (con.)

the Chamber of Urban Planners, and Ayse Mucella Yapici, a leading member of the Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects, both received 18 year prison sentences after their role opposing development plans during the 'Gezi Park' protests in 2013, even though this happened ten years ago.

This aggressive approach to any critics of the government has continued after the earthquake.

In the West, it is quite usual – and applauded – for individuals to make heroic efforts to raise money for victims. Unfortunately in Turkey it is seen as subversive.

Following the earthquake this humanitarian instinct was shown by former Turkish rock star Haluk Levent, who had already formed a self-help NGO called 'Ahhap' in 2017. After the earthquake, the organisation very rapidly collected billions of Turkish liras from the great and good, including Madonna and many Turkish pop stars, for its relief work in the earthquake zone.

Rather than be praised, he was immediately attacked by government supporters, and has been warned by the government's Interior Minister that the government will take action against those "...exploiting donations and trying to compete with the state" (4).

# Syria: treading carefully through the geo-political minefield

The north west area of Syria hit by the earthquake is a microcosm of international conflicts and tensions. There are four 'main players' in the region:

- The Syrian government of Assad, backed by Russia and Iran.
- Areas effectively controlled by Turkey, though their support for the 'Syrian Interim Government'.
- Areas held by groups that evolved from Al-Qaeda, namely the Hurras al-Deen and Hayat Tahir al-Sham.
- The US backed Kurds in the north east, which was less affected by the earthquake.

Syria has already been ravaged by over a decade of war. Even before the earthquake, 90 per cent of the 4.4 million people living in the north west region were reliant on humanitarian aid.

Despite this, delivering aid has been fraught with difficulty. Throughout the conflict, the Assad government has insisted that all aid, including for the rebel held areas, should come through his government. But the UN was concerned his regime was taking a cut from any supplies

that arrived, while at the same time weaponizing humanitarian aid by using it as a political bargaining chip.

This is why, early in the civil war, the UN and humanitarian organizations insisted aid be delivered across the Turkish border, directly into opposition-held areas, and without having to ask permission from the Assad regime. This is how the majority of aid has arrived in opposition-held areas over past years.

In mid-2014, the United Nation's Security Council, or UNSC, got involved in making decisions on aid for Syria.

Security Council members decided that UN humanitarian agencies and their partners should be allowed to use four different border crossings — two through Turkey and one each through Jordan and Iraq — without asking for permission. This had to be ratified by the UNSC every six months.

However, because of Russia's increased military support for Assad from around 2015, and then in 2022, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, has heightened diplomatic tensions inside the UNSC itself. From 2020 on, at Russian

■ Damage to road infrastructure such as this example in Turkey, initially virtually halted aid via Turkey to Syria, after the only permitted crossing at Bab-al-Hawa was damaged





## Syria (con.)

insistence, the UNSC has allowed only one Turkish-Syrian border crossing to be used for aid deliveries. Even after the earthquake the Assad regime continued to use the border crossings as a political football as, according to Joseph Daher, an expert on Syria at the European University Institute in Italy, "... a way for the regime to ... instrumentalize this tragedy for its own political purposes" (5).

This situation brings with it the bureaucracy brought by the confines of international diplomacy. The Turkish government had given strong hints that it would agree to open two more crossings as early as February 8, but the UN decided to wait for the Syrian government to agree as well.

Raed Saleh, head of the Syrian volunteer rescue group, the White Helmets, commented: "In the face of one of the deadliest catastrophes to strike the world in years, it seems the UN's hands were tied by red tape" (6).

This was why 10 days after the quake 95 per cent of the rebel held areas had not been searched by SAR teams – the only crossing, at Bab-al-Hawa, was severely damaged in the quake.

Equally the region's politics came into play, despite the tragedy. A humanitarian convoy from the Kurd held area was turned back. Aid from the Assad regime

meanwhile, was refused by the Hayat Tahir al-Sham held areas.

To this can be added confusion and delays around the various sanctions against the Assad regime – humanitarian aid is exempt, but for example there are massive fuel shortages in Syria because of the sanctions, causing problems for NGOs and relief organisations transporting their aid. In addition, the financial sanctions make it difficult to transfer money for humanitarian relief, or simply Syrians now living abroad trying to wire money to their stricken relatives.

In addition, some of the groups controlling rebel areas are deemed terrorist organisations by the US.

Fortunately, international pressure is beginning to have effect, and the Assad regime has agreed that two more crossings from Turkey can be opened, for the next three months.

■ Troops from the 'Syrian Free Army' in a Turkish controlled area carry out a rescue mission



### Sources:

1. *Time Magazine Digital*, 18.02.23.
2. *Sunday Times*, 12.02.23.
3. 'How democratic is Turkey?', *Foreign Policy*, 03.06.13.
4. *Middle East Eye*, 11.02.23, [www.middleeasteye.net](http://www.middleeasteye.net)
5. *Washington Post*, 14.02.23
6. 'Earthquake in Syria: Victims deplore slow aid deliveries', *Deutsche Welle*, 18.02.23, [www.dw.com](http://www.dw.com)

## West Mids firefighters in double tour

■ The WMFS team greeted on arrival in Malawi



MEMBERS of West Midlands Fire Service were deployed in March to Malawi in response to devastating storms that have swept the country, only a month after 77 members arrived back in the UK from Turkey.

The request for UK assistance from the Malawian government came after it declared a state of disaster in 10 southern districts, as Storm Freddy hit for a second time.

The WMFS response was part of the United Kingdom International Search and Rescue (UK ISAR) commitments. Those deployed are volunteer members of UK

ISAR and are joined by dedicated medical teams who volunteer from UK organisations outside of the fire and rescue service.

WMFS was among other UK fire and rescue services to have answered the call for international help, by sending a 27-person flood response team.

Wayne Brown, Chief Fire Officer of West Midlands Fire Service, said: "Just four weeks after our volunteers were part of the international response to the earthquakes in Turkey, they are once again preparing to help another nation in dire need.

"UK ISAR volunteers from the West Midlands will provide a Search and Rescue Flood Response.

"As always, we are extremely grateful to them for answering the call and they will receive all necessary support during their deployment.

"We will also be keenly focused on their health and wellbeing upon their return, having been involved in two deployments so close together."

# Negotiating the hurdles in delivering aid

Many of the general public do not understand the difficulties in getting aid to areas stricken by disasters. It is not just the political or military situation as has been seen in Syria and Turkey, but even for countries with a peaceful environment – particularly those with an already poor infrastructure – there are still many barriers to cross.

In the Summer 2015 issue of *Resilience*, we carried a report of a presentation by the then Chief Fire Officer for Lincolnshire, Dave Ramscar, to a 'Gold Symposium' hosted by Lincolnshire Local Resilience Forum.

Dave had just returned from Nepal, having led the UK International Search and Rescue Team there, after the country suffered a massive earthquake which left 8,500 dead and 20,000 injured.

We reprint part of the article here, where Dave outlined the logistical and co-ordination challenges that the UK team faced:

Getting into a disaster struck zone is an ordeal in itself. Firstly, before deployment, there has to be a formal request from the host government, which in turn then has to be signed off by the UK's Secretary of State for the (then) Department for International Development.

This came at 3pm. After initially arriving at Heathrow, the full team finally deployed from Stansted at 10pm. Dave said that you use the waiting time to coalesce the several SAR teams from various Fire & Rescue Services into one team.



■ The UKSAR team awaiting to deploy in Nepal in 2015. They eventually left at 10 pm, only to be diverted to Delhi after congestion over Kathmandu

The problem was however, that with over 70 international teams descending on Nepal, Kathmandu airport suddenly became as busy as Heathrow, with limited capacity for so many aircraft.

As they were stacked over Kathmandu, the pilot explained it was the same for everyone – he pointed out that the aircraft flying below them was carrying the Prime Minister of Nepal, who was having to wait like everyone else.

When it became clear that congestion was too great, they flew back to Delhi to await a slot. Eventually, getting an opening at 3am, Dave's first job was to plug the UK team into the rescue operation's battle rhythm. They were assigned the Chautara area 80 kilometres north east of Kathmandu. This area had seen 1,200 people killed, while it took the initial team six hours to get there by road, given the damage and land slips that blocked the way...

... After their deployment, they returned to the UK on the eve of the General Election, which Dave pointed out saved them from the usual media scrum at Heathrow as the media were all otherwise occupied.

There had been one last problem – it was a commercial flight and the dog handlers were unhappy with their rescue dogs having to return in the cargo hold. The Norwegian team, which had the facilities on their flight, offered to take the dogs and then organise their return to the UK.

Which they did – in a private jet. So

■ Dave Ramscar's team at work in Nepal

Dave's team endured a long haul, commercial flight, while the dogs got the executive treatment!

Dave said there were important observations to make about the operation. A theme of discussions at the Lincolnshire meeting was about the assumptions that can be made at the top, that when decisions are made, have they filtered down to ground level?

There were instances of this in Nepal. The Nepalese government had clearly requested international help and assumed the normal tariffs and taxes would be suspended. But this had not reached the people on the ground, so Dave said it was very frustrating to have local airport authorities demanding the usual \$50 tourist tax or \$75 business tax per person at 3am, when you are trying urgently to deploy.

The first helicopter also faced delays over arguments about departure taxes. It was soon rectified but demonstrated that important decisions at the top don't get passed down.

The other important issue was co-ordination. With everyone rushing to help, there needs to be co-ordination to avoid the congestion faced at Kathmandu airport.

This co-ordination is needed on the ground too. There were 72 international teams – some of them Non-Government Organisations – of which only 18, including the UK International Search and Rescue team, were part of the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG), which is a network of disaster-prone and disaster-responding countries and organizations dedicated to urban search and rescue and operational field co-ordination.

With so many groups present outside INSARAG, there were cases of the non-classified teams searching areas that had already been searched. The key lesson for the future, said Dave, was co-ordination.





# UKRAINE



## One year on

IT IS now one year on since the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The past 12 months has brought previously unimaginable scenes of death, destruction and human suffering on European soil.

It has also brought the largest human displacement in the world today, with a third of the Ukrainian population having been forced from their homes. The UN reports:

- 8 million refugees have been received across Europe, with 5 million of them registering

for temporary protection.

- Inside Ukraine, 6 million have been internally displaced.
- 17.6 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance (1)

It has caused terrible destruction of the civilian infrastructure, with millions dependent for safety, protection and assistance on the emergency services. *Resilience* looks at how emergency and health responders have coped over the past 12 months ■

# Ukraine ramps up its warning and informing

A key part of Ukraine’s defensive strategy was its ‘warning and informing the public’ campaign.

Facing increasing Russian disinformation campaigns plus intelligence reports beginning to raise the possibility of a Russian invasion of the whole country, in March 2021 the Ukrainian government formed the Centre for Strategic Communications and Information Security.

In December 2021, as the invasion threat was beginning to look more evident and the Russian disinformation offensive ramped up, the Centre organised the ‘Kyiv Stratcom Forum’ (similar to the UK’s ‘Media Emergency Forums’ of the past).

This brought together 32 communications and media experts from the Ukraine and internationally, to look at communication tools and messaging in terms of co-operation between the government and civil society, in order to improve national resilience to ‘information threats’.

Ukraine had already seen the impact of ‘anti-vax’ disinformation during Covid – such methods would be even more dangerous when a neighbouring country intends to invade you, in spreading fear, confusion and defeatist propaganda.

As Russian forces built up on its borders, Ukraine’s Centre for Strategic Communications and Information Security – together with State Emergency Service, the Ministry of Defence, the Office of the Commander in Chief of the Ukrainian Armed Forces and public organisations – rushed out a booklet to give urgent safety and ‘warning and informing’ advice to its citizens, initially in the country’s border areas (see feature in the Winter 2021-22 issue of *Resilience*), called *In Case of Emergency or War*.

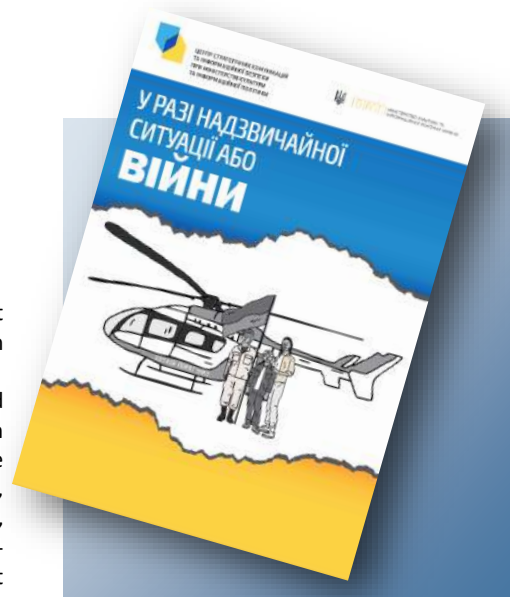
They based the advice on not only their experiences in eastern Ukraine, but also other conflicts from around the world, and was published in Ukrainian, Russian and English (for citizens from overseas).

When the invasion and bombardments began, so the campaign rapidly went online for

the whole country to see, at *dovidka.info* (‘dovidka’ is the Ukrainian for ‘view’).

This has been constantly expanded over the first year of war, with advice on chemical weapons or what to do in the event of an airstrike on a chemical plant, which was added in March 2022, through to – more ominously – this February adding steps to take in the event of a nuclear attack or radiation threats.

The communication tools are ever developing, and Ukraine has been assisted this year by a \$1.5 million package from the German government, through the UN’s Development Programme. UNDP Resident Representative Jaco Cilliers said the contribution will go towards strengthening Ukraine’s response capabilities at all levels: “By enhancing the capacities of government institutions to counter disinformation and by introducing new IT solutions for crisis coordination and communication, we will help ensure Ukraine is better prepared to respond to emergencies and that essential services continue to be delivered to the population, even in the most challenging of circumstances” (4).



**‘UN: we will help ensure Ukraine is better prepared to respond to emergencies and that essential services continue to be delivered to the population, even in the most challenging of circumstances’**

■ Above: the pamphlet distributed to Ukrainian homes: *In case of Emergency and War*. Centre: the *dovidka.info* website  
Below: the massive destruction has seen the largest human displacement in the world today.





# Health and fire services under constant attack

GIVEN the nature of the profession, emergency responders have been at the brunt of the conflict, with many casualties.

Health facilities have been particularly targeted, and a study by several Human Rights groups and NGOs – and verified by CNN – has found there have been over 700 attacks on health care facilities, and one in 10 of Ukrainian hospitals damaged.

There have been a further 205 attacks on pharmacies and ambulances. Over 200 doctors, nurses and medical staff have either been killed, wounded, kidnapped or imprisoned, says the report.

The UN's International Organisation for Migration reported on 22 December 2022, that one in three Ukrainians now lack access to medical care (3).

Figures are not available for the firefighters of the State Emergency Service, but it is known from media reports that in the first few months of the invasion, 43 personnel were killed and it is expected that that figure rose exponentially over the following months, particularly given the role firefighters undertake in Ukraine.

Unlike many other fire services, the Ukrainian fire service is an 'all-hazards response service'.

Amongst their roles is to undertake bomb disposal. Before the current conflict they had much experience of this, given the high levels of ordnance left after World War II in what was a key area in the battles of the Eastern Front. Today, isolating unexploded shells and other devices is a major part of their role.

A new role for them however in the current conflict has also been in detaining suspected spies (4).



■ By January 2023, damage caused to the Ukrainian infrastructure was totalled at \$138 billion (source: Kyiv School of Economics, 24.01.23)

## Natural disasters give Ukraine a break



■ The 2020 forest fire at Chernobyl

ASIDE from the horrors of the current conflict, Ukraine fortunately appears to have had few natural disasters or major incidents over the past year.

The two main natural disasters usually affecting Ukraine are forest fires and floods.

The last major forest fire incident was in 2020, when the forestry in the Chernobyl

Exclusion Zone ignited.

This caused a thick haze which blanketed Kyiv, making it at one point – on 16 April 2020 – having the worst air pollution in the world. However, it coincided with the Covid-19 lock-down, meaning the vast majority of the population were inside and as a result there was little impact on health.

Also, the UN's atomic agency stated that radiation levels had stayed under safety norms.

It was feared that the current conflict with its gunfire, shelling and missile strikes would cause major forest fires.

Aside from deliberate shelling by Russian forces aimed at igniting fields of grain, that does not appear to have occurred, one theory being that with so many military and civilian forces being deployed across the country, any potential major ignitions are quickly extinguished.

CBRN incidents have been limited too. The potentially serious incidents at Chernobyl and the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power station have been well documented, although at the time of writing the situation at the latter is beginning to look critical.

The other major CBRN incident was in March 2022 during the Battle of Sumy, when an airstrike hit one of the Ammonia tanks at the Sumykhimprom plant.

Contamination spread out to a 1.6 mile radius, affecting two villages. However, fortunately due to the direction of the wind, the nearby city of Sumy was largely unaffected.

In terms of floods, much of it this time around has been 'hydraulic warfare', whether Ukrainians flooding areas in the path of advancing Russian forces, or dam bursts caused by airstrikes.

# Covid vaccination roll-out carries on

AS WE all learnt during the pandemic, an emergency vaccine roll-out is a massive task. It is hard to imagine trying to achieve it in a time of war, and in a country that has historically been ‘vaccine hesitant’.

Before the 2022 invasion, vaccine take up against any disease was very low amongst the Ukrainian population.

This was not just because of ‘anti-vax’ disinformation campaigns on social media. The Ukrainian medicines and pharmaceuticals sector was riddled with corruption – this led to exorbitant prices for drugs, but perhaps more importantly, because of the wide-scale corruption people did not trust the authenticity of the medicines they were being asked to take.

The wake-up call for the authorities however came in 2015, when there was a Polio outbreak, infecting over 20 children. This sent shock waves through not just Ukraine but the international community, as it had been thought that Polio had been eradicated from Europe.

The person chosen by the Ukrainian government to oversee reform was a US born Ukrainian, radiologist Ulana Suprum, who had returned to Ukraine after the first Russian invasion of the eastern provinces, and was appointed acting Minister of Health.

She introduced three key reforms:

- The establishment of a new institution that would transparently conduct Ukrainian government health contracts.
- Rely on established and trusted international agencies to procure drugs and medicines.
- Shift patient care from hospitals to Primary Care centres, to make vaccines and medicines more accessible.

The reforms were beginning to work. In 2015, the Polio vaccination rate amongst young children was 58 per cent. By 2019, it was 83 per cent.

This put Ukraine in a better position to combat the Covid pandemic when it arrived in 2020.

On 8 February 2022, the Ministry of Health announced the milestone of over 50 per cent of the adult population having at least one dose of the Covid vaccine, with plans to reach 70 per cent (and 80 per cent of the elderly population) in the coming months. The Ministry of Health was giving regular updates on vaccine figures and Covid cases, but this came to an abrupt halt on 23 February 2022.

However, by May 2022 the country’s Chief Sanitary Officer, Ihor Kuzin, did report that there had been 750 separate studies undertaken, despite the wartime conditions, and no further Covid outbreaks were expected.

Since then the vaccination campaign has continued, although obviously on a much smaller scale. Even so, Ukraine has been vaccinating 50-60,000 people a week, with the roll out in all regions, except the battlegrounds of the Luhansk and Donetsk Oblasts in the east.

By September 2022, Ukraine had stocks of 10 million vaccines, and



the Ministry of Health announced a third dose was now available to everyone (four months after their previous vaccination), while the age limit for Covid vaccination was lowered from 12 years to five (5).

Despite the health successes against all odds, it is still a very steep hill to climb.

As Ulana Suprum said at the beginning of the 2022 invasion: “... setbacks facing the health care system are related directly to the destruction of facilities, the lack of medical professionals as many have joined the Territorial Defence or the military, and the difficulty in resupplying pharmacies and hospitals due to constant missile and other attacks by the Russian military” (6).



## Sources

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2. UNDP press statement, 22.02.23
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