The National Briefing on Societal Resilience [UK+]

What is 'The National Briefing on Societal Resilience [UK+]'?

The National Briefing on Societal Resilience [UK+] is produced by Alliance Manchester Business School (AMBS) on behalf of The National Consortium for Societal Resilience [UK+] (NCSR+).

The briefing speaks to practitioners who work to enhance the resilience of society, including government, emergency planners, resilience officers, the voluntary sector, business, and communities. The briefing shares knowledge and good practice on operationalising societal resilience, and lessons from ongoing design and implementation work on the NCSR+ strategy and manual on how to create a Local Resilience Capability based on interconnected modules.

NCSR+ also promotes events relevant to societal resilience and runs a series of webinars that explore how societal resilience is developed and delivered.

Four upcoming 'How to… communities' webinars:

REGISTER: 06/05/2025

How to retain volunteers:
https://bit.ly/4iYi7mg

REGISTER: 02/06/2025

How to address flood risk:
https://bit.ly/4lieEAA

REGISTER: 25/06/2025

Respecting animals & respecting cultures in times of disruption:
https://bit.ly/3FXhMld

REGISTER: 01/07/2025

How to support the wellbeing of volunteers:
https://bit.ly/3FVmoZa

Register for the 4th National Conference on Societal Resilience, 24-25 February 2026. Book here

Download our practitioner modules which describe how to create a Local Resilience Capability. Access here

Connect with us to keep up to date on news, events, and our impact

Previous briefings. If this is the first briefing you have received and you'd like to access more, check them out here

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Third National Conference on Societal Resilience

The National Consortium for Societal Resilience [UK+] ran its third national conference at Alliance Manchester Business School (The University of Manchester, UK, 10-11 March 2025) which continued its national conversation on societal resilience to disruption. We collectively addressed the conference theme of *What worked? What didn't? Why?*

The conference again provided a vital networking forum bringing together partners from policy and practice from across UK+ and internationally, to share insights, learn together with like-minded colleagues, and identify collaborative opportunities on how to enhance societal resilience. We welcomed over 160 people from local resilience partnerships, voluntary, community, and social enterprise sector (VCSE) organisations, central and local government, academic institutions, and the private sector.

Over the two days, participants were inspired by and learned from a range of compelling speakers who covered the topics:

- The ingredients of a successful community resilience group

- The reason to be optimistic on societal resilience

- Partnering through the local resilience forum

- Partnering with GP surgeries

- Partnering with businesses

You can view the full range of speakers and the organisations that they represent on the [AMBS website](#).

This briefing provides some highlights from the conference from the key issues discussed across three facilitated discussion sessions. Two of these discussions centred on the scenario of a major cyber-attack in 2040.

Conference participants were distributed across fifteen round tables, each of which contained a mix of representatives from different sectors plus a table facilitator. Insights from table discussions were captured using Mentimeter. We synthesise these insights below with the help of an AI tool and sprinkle participant quotations throughout to flavour the narrative.

This briefing is structured as follows:

- Introduction to the major cyber-attack in 2040

- Insights from the major cyber-attack in 2040 (Part 1)

- Insights from the major cyber-attack in 2040 (Part 2)

- Insights on What worked? What didn't? Why?

Introduction to the cyber-attack in 2040 scenario

Our activity scenario drew heavily on the work of the [Resilience Beyond Observed Capabilities Network+](#) (RBOC+) which aims to help the UK to prepare for security threats in the coming decades. To set the scene for Part 1 of the activity and stimulate thinking for the discussion, a 4-minute AI-generated video "Cyber-attack on the nation's energy grid" was shown based on the following scenario:

- Catastrophic cyber-attack on digital and energy networks in the year 2040

- A cold winter so high demand for electricity

- National Electricity Transmission System fails

- Those without back-up generators lose mains electricity supply without warning

- Secondary impacts across utility networks (including water, fuel and gas)

- Disruption to public services provision, businesses and households

- Gradual reconnection with intermittent power supply, but restoration could take up to one month

- Restoration of critical services may take several months

And the anticipated community response to the scenario:

- Communities are very concerned

- Spontaneous volunteers are emerging to help

- Everyone is working very locally

- Local people are trying to understand the local needs and how those can be addressed

Insights from the cyber-attack in 2040 (Part 1)

We are extremely grateful to our speaker from the UK's National Cyber Security Centre for providing an insightful inject to the scenario on the impacts of a cyber-attack on societal resilience.

Table discussions considered two questions:

1) What are society's needs, offers, and assets in this disruption?

2) What are you already doing to help society to surge in this disruption?

On Question 1, the top five points raised by conference participants on society's needs, offers, and assets in this disruption were:

Point 1: Basic human needs are paramount

The most frequently and emphatically stated need identified was the provision of basic human needs, primarily water and food. Other essential basic needs include warmth, shelter, and sanitation. These needs form the foundation of Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

Point 2: Communication is critical and challenged

Maintaining communication is identified as a significant need and a major challenge. Participants emphasised the need for short-term communication to understand what is happening, establishing offline communication routes, utilising resources like radios, and focusing on face-to-face interaction. The management of misinformation and the need for trusted sources of information are also highlighted.

Point 3: Community resilience is a key asset and solution

Participants emphasised the importance of community-led solutions and relationships. Assets include knowing your neighbours, community networks, volunteers, local hubs, and community resilience plans. Offers of support and redeployment of resources from within communities are seen as crucial. Building clarity of roles and relationships in advance is also vital for effective community response.

Point 4: Vulnerable populations require special attention

Identifying and supporting vulnerable people without access to usual records or support systems creates a significant need. Offers of vulnerable persons' support and prioritisation of their needs for essentials like food, medicine, and shelter are crucial.

Point 5: Preparedness and planning essential at all levels

There is a need for plans at community and personal levels. This includes having backup plans that are not electricity dependent, identifying local resources, establishing emergency plans, and raising public awareness about the lack of access to basic facilities in an interruption. The need for clarity of roles in response and recovery was also mentioned.

What participants said:

"Communications are key for society but also the biggest challenge in the scenario."

"Immediate medical need for those on 'life' supporting equipment. Don't throw away the old analogue kit!"

"Needs are basics like food and water, but banking systems should also… offer solutions to provide cash or some form of money for people."

On Question 2, the top five points raised by conference participants on what people are already doing to help society to surge were:

Point 1: Education, awareness, and training

This was consistently highlighted as a crucial element. It includes raising awareness of potential disruptions, educating communities about specific risks and available resources, providing training in practical skills and critical thinking, and conducting community drills and simulations. The goal is to empower individuals and communities with the knowledge and skills needed to prepare for and respond to disruptions.

Point 2: Community building and networking

Establishing and strengthening relationships with communities was emphasised by participants. This involves connecting people through groups, encouraging communication, building social capital, developing community support networks, and fostering hyper-local mutual aid. The aim is to create dependable networks where people trust and support each other during challenging times.

Point 3: Community resilience hubs and meeting points

The concept of establishing physical locations within communities to provide support, information, and resources during disruptions was frequently mentioned. These community emergency hubs (or "Chubs") can serve as centers of operation, information sharing, and distribution of essential supplies. Identifying venues for help and pre-planning their use are key aspects.

Point 4: Emergency preparedness planning

Encouraging and developing emergency plans at individual, community, and organisational levels is a strong theme. This includes creating community emergency plans, developing business continuity plans, having contingency plans for essential needs like food and water, and adapting existing plans to suit different scenarios. The importance of testing plans through exercises and simulations was noted.

Point 5: Empowering communities and fostering self-reliance

Participants stressed the importance of empowering communities to understand their role as first responders and to be self-reliant in mobilising their own capabilities. This involves giving communities the tools and knowledge to help themselves, fostering agency, and building confidence in their ability to manage during incidents.

What participants said:

"We are connecting people via groups, establishing relationships and encouraging communities to talk to each other."

"Training, awareness raising, community resilience hubs and working with neighbourhood level groups."

"Raising awareness about the need for hyper-local community resilience planning. Connecting partners efforts to change mindset top-down and bottom-up about the need for preparedness."

Insights from the cyber-attack in 2040 (Part 2)

We are extremely grateful to Emma Barrett, Professor of Psychology, Security and Trust at The University of Manchester for providing an insightful injection to the scenario on myths, misinformation, and trust in societal resilience.

To set the scene for Part 2 of the activity and stimulate thinking for the discussion, another 4-minute AI-generated video "The night the lights went out" was shown based on the following scenario:

■ Power outage across the Greater Manchester region

■ No electricity so city systems are unavailable

■ No communications are available

■ Society is in chaos

■ Lots of misinformation and disinformation is being created

■ No-one knows what information is trustworthy

Table discussions considered the following questions:

1) How could misinformation in society affect the response?

2) How should misinformation be addressed for societal resilience?

On Question 1, the top five points raised by conference participants on how misinformation could affect the response were:

Point 1: Building trust and relationships with communities and trusted voices before an incident

Participants identified this as crucial for ensuring that verified information is heard and trusted during a crisis. This includes identifying trusted sources used by priority and vulnerable communities, building relationships with agencies, local community groups, traditional/local leaders, and trusted actors within communities. Trust is not assumed and needs to be earned, built in 'peace time', and invested in.

Point 2: Timely and consistent communication of accurate information from reliable sources

This was identified as essential to fill the information vacuum and to address the spread of misinformation. Agencies should aim for consistent messaging, 'singing from the same hymn sheet', and establishing an early media cell to agree on this messaging. It is important to communicate early, even before all the information is available, and to be honest about what is unknown. Proactive communication on the 'front foot' with pre-agreed messages was recommended by participants.

Point 3: Investing in education and promoting media literacy

These are vital for enabling the public to scrutinise information and make rational, evidence-based judgements. This includes teaching young people in schools, considering initiatives for post-school individuals, investing in education around verifying information, encouraging critical thinking skills, and digital literacy training.

Point 4: Actively monitoring social media for misinformation

Identifying unverified information and addressing it quickly was seen by participants as necessary to mitigate its negative impact. This involves investing in police intelligence teams and multi-agency information cells. Engaging with extreme voices of outrage and addressing their worries and questions, rather than isolating them, might also lessen the spread of misinformation. Understanding and challenging the narratives behind misinformation through conversation is also important.

Point 5: Preparedness is key to an effective response to misinformation

Preparedness includes investing in communication infrastructure, identifying trusted voices, and establishing pre-agreed protocols. This involves upskilling administrators of sites or pages, ensuring investment in communication by trusted authoritative voices, using trusted community-based information sources, and developing secure communication channels. Being familiar with technology and understanding how AI works was also identified as being important.

What participants said:

"You must communicate and cannot hold information back. Start before it's needed and build voices of influence. Start a community newsletter, familiarise the channels ahead of time."

"Build trust before an incident so people know where verified information comes from."

"Can divert resources to false area of need. Using trusted community-based information sources that already exist… to address this."

Insights on What worked? What didn't? Why?

Participant feedback at the conference was also sought on the importance of partnering to enhance societal resilience to disruption.

Table discussions considered two questions:

1) Why is collaboration, not competition, so hard?

2) What do you need to do differently for collaboration to prevail?

On Question 1, the top five points raised by conference participants regarding why collaboration, not competition, is so hard were:

Point 1: Time constraints and the resource-intensive nature of collaboration

Participants highlighted the considerable time and effort required to build relationships, establish agreements, and manage collaborative initiatives. It is seen as "resource intensive to get off the ground" and "extra work on top of the day to day". Businesses, especially small ones, are often focused on survival and lack the time to engage.

Point 2: Lack of trust and challenges in building relationships

Trust was repeatedly identified as a crucial element for successful collaboration, and its absence is a major barrier. Building trust takes time, and staff turnover can disrupt established relationships. Suspicion of motives and a lack of understanding of mutual benefits also hinder trust.

Point 3: Competing priorities and organisational silos

Organisations often have different competing priorities, strategies, and work streams that make alignment challenging. Participants also pointed to 'fragmented siloed working' within and across organisations, which impedes a holistic view and makes collaboration difficult. Single agency involvement is often perceived as easier than navigating these differing priorities.

Point 4: Competition for funding and financial concerns

Limited funding streams and the competitive nature of grants and commissioning drive organisations towards competition rather than collaboration. Concerns about finances, profits, and the perception that collaboration may increase workload or risk reputation are also significant deterrents identified by participants. The 'financial bottom lines for sectors' often make competition the default.

Point 5: Barriers to information sharing

Fear of giving away commercially sensitive information, lack of clarity on information governance, and the protection of information (need to know, official sensitive) create significant challenges for effective collaboration. A reluctance to share information and a lack of understanding about what information can be shared further exacerbate.

What participants said:

"Siloed ways of working – can't create a holistic view of people's needs."

"Collaboration hard due to barriers created by different language across different approaches."

"Lack of understanding and awareness within and across LRF areas about what capability exists across business, voluntary sector, communities… and lack of resource to get that understanding."

On Question 2, the top five points raised by conference participants on what needs to be done differently for collaboration to prevail were:

Point 1: Building strong relationships and trust is fundamental

Participants identified how this involves investing time to get to know partners, fostering open communication, and having trust in others. Relationships can support greater openness, while staff turnover can hinder collaboration by disrupting established relationships.

Point 2: Effective communication and shared understanding are essential

Using plain language and demystifying terminology to ensure everyone understands what resilience means to each stakeholder. Participants also identified how this involves actively listening to others, understanding different perspectives (thinking from the other person's point of view), and breaking down barriers of understanding.

Point 3: Identifying and working towards common objectives and shared benefits is crucial

Collaboration should focus on finding common ground and resources that can be shared from the start. Understanding partners' limitations and capabilities, as well as their needs, wants, and aims, helps in identifying areas for collaborative working and determining win-win situations.

Point 4: Time, engagement, and a willingness to step outside comfort zones are necessary investments

Collaboration takes time and requires active engagement with partners. Participants identified how this includes going to where communities and partners are rather than expecting them to always come to you. Being willing to step outside your comfort zone and trusting others are also important aspects identified.

Point 5: Addressing systemic and structural barriers while promoting supportive frameworks is vital

Red tape and bureaucracy can make collaboration difficult. There is a need to connect workstreams, potentially reduce the number of repetitive meetings, and consider joint funding approaches. National direction and clearer strategic priorities from central government can also help local partners align their efforts.

What participants said:

"Step outside your comfort zone and… trust in others."

"Find common objectives and resources that can be shared from the start. Understand partners' limitations and capabilities."

"Think local AND global, need to mesh the local approach and care for communities with the global accountability. Find trusted voices and champion them. Think of how we create a real ecosystem."

Conclusion

A scenario that considers a cyber-attack and its impact on societal resilience was novel to many conference participants, particularly those from the voluntary sector and community groups. So, while resilience partners may plan and exercise such situations, there is added benefit to be gained from explicitly testing the resilience of society in those exercises.

This can be made more valuable by involving a wider range of partners in the exercises in several ways. For example, local resilience partnerships could involve a wider group of organisations in those exercises to include national voluntary sector organisations. Local resilience partnerships could bring together a range of community groups and ask them to participate in their own places alongside your exercise. And local resilience partnerships could even involve academia to identify lessons and contribute/extract research insights to/from those exercises.

Societal resilience cannot be done alone. It requires a rich partnership of resilience and non-resilience actors all pulling together in the same direction. NCSR+ and the national conference is one mechanism to encourage and enable wider collaboration.

Looking forward to welcoming you next year!

We have begun preparations for the 4th National Conference on Societal Resilience to take place over two days on 24 and 25 February 2026 at the Whitworth Hall, The University of Manchester. Booking is open and you can secure your place at the Online Store.

Word Cloud capturing the conference participant table feedback

With thanks to the conference sponsors: