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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.

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[A lifetime of resilience: flood engagement through every life stage](#)

WATCH BACK: 12/03/2026

[Assessing the public value of societal resilience to disruption](#)

WATCH BACK: 29/01/2026

[Intergenerational learning to strengthen community resilience to disruption](#)

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Fourth National Conference on Societal Resilience

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The National Consortium for Societal Resilience [UK+] ran its fourth national conference at Alliance Manchester Business School (The University of Manchester, UK, 24-25 February 2026) which continued its national and international conversation on societal resilience to disruption. We collectively addressed the theme of *society in resilience* including the topics:

- Children, young people and disaster risk reduction
- Families and intergenerational learning for resilience to disruption
- Civil society as a co-developed capability with resilience partners
- Operation Water Outage as an exercise in civil society resilience to disruption.

We welcomed over 200 people from resilience partnerships, voluntary, community, faith, and social enterprise sector (VCFSE) organisations, central and local government, academic institutions, and the private sector. Colleagues attended from Australia, the Netherlands, Nigeria, and Finland. The conference again provided a vital networking forum to share insights, learn together, and identify collaborative opportunities to enhance societal resilience.

Over the two days, participants were inspired by and learned from a range of compelling speakers. The full range of speakers and the organisations that they represent can be viewed on the [conference webpage](#).

This briefing provides some conference highlights from the key issues discussed across four facilitated discussion sessions. We synthesise below (with the aid of Copilot) the insights captured via Mentimeter from table discussions, two of which centred on the scenario of a major water outage.

This briefing is structured as follows:

- Young people in resilience to disruption
- Operation Water Outage (Part 1)
- Operation Water Outage (Part 2)
- The opportunity ahead and how we grab it.

Young people in resilience to disruption

We are extremely grateful to our speaker Dr Martin Parham from the Humanitarian and Conflict Response Institute, The University of Manchester, who facilitated a panel discussion with young people on societal resilience. Young people from Manchester, London, Cheshire, and Lanarkshire shared their unique perspectives on stage and joined the later table discussions.

Table discussions considered two questions:

- 1) What are you doing to enhance how young people are resilient to disruption?
- 2) What does a gold standard resilience package for young people look like?

On Question 1, the top three points raised were:

Point 1: Strong existing engagement but highly inconsistent across regions

Many areas rely heavily on Fire and Rescue Services, cadet programmes (Fire, Police, Scouts), and school visits to deliver resilience education. Activities include HYPER (Hampshire Young Peoples Emergency Response programme), household emergency planning, grab-bag education, safety challenges, and interactive drills. Participants acknowledged "not enough", "nothing currently", or "left to local responders", showing a patchwork of provision rather than a national approach.

Point 2: Appetite for more structured, accessible, and youth-focused resilience resources

Repeated calls for better resources, shared language, and nationally consistent materials. Desire for risk-based storybooks, child-friendly materials, Susie books, and interactive learning (hazard alley, supermarket sweep, resilience challenges). The need to make content more engaging, age-appropriate, and aligned with how young people learn, was recognized by participants.

Point 3: Meaningful youth engagement requires listening, collaboration, and breaking silos

Strong emphasis on listening to young people, not lecturing them. Barriers include school system complexity, lack of staff, and siloed working across agencies. Many participants want to build youth resilience networks, involve young volunteers, and work more closely with community groups, voluntary organisations, and influencers. There was a shared sense that resilience must be co-created with young people, not delivered to them.

On Question 2, the top three points raised on what a gold standard resilience package for young people looks like were:

Point 1: Co-design with young people is essential

Young people should shape, deliver, and participate in resilience education rather than having it imposed. This includes their lived experience, preferred communication styles, and their leadership. What participants said:

- "It is one that is developed in conjunction with target audience focusing on participation rather than by rote learning."
- "It should be with young people not for them."
- "Shaped and delivered by young people who have a genuine relatability to the young people in the area."

Point 2: Make it engaging, interactive, and relevant to real life

The strongest theme was that resilience learning must be hands-on, fun, practical, and based on real risks. Young people disengage from passive or overly formal teaching.

What participants said:

- "Interactive sessions not death by PowerPoint."
- "Exposure to risks and simulated risks – be creative with how to translate risks to youth."
- "Fun and engaging, not scary, gives them genuinely useful things to do that promotes their agency."

Point 3: Tailor to local context and diverse needs

There is no single "gold standard." Participants emphasise hyperlocal design, adaptability, and inclusion - different communities, risks, learning styles, and demographics require different approaches. What participants said:

- "There isn't one – a gold standard for one school, town, or demographic will most likely have very limited success at the next one along."
- "Flexible, know your community, tailor the messages accordingly."
- "Adaptation for different learning styles."

Operation Water Outage (Part 1)

We are extremely grateful to our speaker Dr Villó Lelkes, Head of Chronic Water Risks at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, for providing an inject to the activity in respect of societal resilience during water outages.

To set the scene for Part 1 of the activity and stimulate thinking for the discussion, a 2-minute video was shown.

Table discussions considered two questions:

- 1) What are society's needs, offers, and assets in Operation Water Outage?
- 2) How can you help society's offers/ assets to address those needs?

On Question 1, the top three points raised were:

Point 1: Water companies must significantly strengthen resilience, investment, and accountability

Participants raised concerns about infrastructure fragility, inadequate contingency planning, and slow investment. Strong expectation that companies fund partner response costs, support voluntary sector capacity, and resource training for public/voluntary agencies. Calls for regulatory "teeth", clearer duties, and consequences when statutory obligations are not met.

Point 2: Communities - especially vulnerable groups - need better planning, communication, and support

Vulnerabilities include non-car ownership, maternity services, health needs, seasonal impacts, and unreliable Priority Services Registers. The need was identified for clear, accessible information, not just via social media; reassurance messaging; and guidance on how to access support. Community assets (leaders, volunteers, hubs, distribution sites) are strong but not fully enabled - as seen in the recent Tunbridge Wells incident.

Point 3: A whole-system approach is required: education, preparedness, and partnership working

Public education is needed on storing water, rainwater collection, and long-term risk awareness. Recognition that three days of stored water is unrealistic for many households. Emphasis on partnerships, mutual aid, voluntary sector involvement, and shared responsibility for local resilience. Need for coordinated planning across emergency services, health care, supermarkets, agriculture, and community groups was also emphasized.

On Question 2, the top three points on helping society's offers/ assets to address needs were:

Point 1: Strengthen community-centred preparedness and resilience

A strong consensus is that resilience starts before the outage, and that communities need tools, knowledge, and confidence to act. Ideas raised include:

- National and local preparedness campaigns (7-days ready, behaviour change, education on water systems).
- Helping households build basic water resilience (water butts, purification tablets, 3–5 days' supply).
- Better communication and education before crises.
- Using community assets: parish councils, faith groups, foodbanks, volunteers, 4x4 groups.
- Training VCFSE organisations so they can continue operating during outages.

Point 2: Improve coordination, communication and data-sharing across agencies

The system is fragmented. People want clarity, shared information, and smoother coordination so response is not reinvented every time. Ideas raised include:

- More joined-up conversations before extreme situations.
- Better communication with the public.
- Sharing data on vulnerable people.
- Building trust between water companies, resilience partnerships, and communities.
- Establish community emergency hubs and separate voluntary-sector distribution centres.
- Learning lessons and creating consistent guidance.

Point 3: Reform, accountability, and long-term infrastructure planning

Participants feel that outages are symptoms of deeper structural issues - planning, regulation, and investment need to catch up with risk. Ideas raised include:

- Water industry reform (including re-nationalisation).
- Ensuring utilities invest more, take fewer profits, and plan for foreseeable risks.
- Regulatory consequences for failing to plan.
- Planning policy for reservoirs, AI data centres, and future water demand.
- Governance of water supplies agreed before an outage.
- Addressing society's long-term relationship with water and encouraging behaviour change.

Operation Water Outage (Part 2)

We are extremely grateful to Kim Williams, Director of Water Resources at Pennon (South West Water), for providing an injection into the water outage scenario based on a Level 4 water emergency (i.e. drought).

To set the scene for Part 2 of the activity and stimulate thinking for the discussion, a 2-minute video was shown.

Table discussions considered two questions:

- 1) How do you deal with the impacts of hot weather in Operation Water Outage?
- 2) How can you work with civil society to address complications when switching the water back on?

On Question 1, the top three points raised were:

Point 1: Preparedness and prevention must be systemic, not reactive

Water scarcity and heat impacts are predictable, chronic risks - not surprises - so planning must happen well before a crisis. This includes pre-planning with water companies and VCFSE partners; investing in hydrometry, prediction tools, and alternative water sources (local wells, boreholes, aquifers); building a culture of low-water living and preparedness; and, identifying critical services and prioritising them early. A multi-agency approach is essential because impacts are multidimensional and cascading.

Point 2: Trusted, coordinated, community-led communication is critical

Trusted voices (VCS, elected members, community leaders, employers, faith groups) must deliver messages, not just official bodies. Key communication needs include early, clear, consistent messaging; health-focused advice (hydration, heat risks, sanitation, alternative water purification); avoiding panic, misinformation, and unhelpful media imagery; and, joined-up comms across agencies, with tailored messaging for vulnerable groups. Community hubs, cool spaces, shops, and local networks become vital channels for reaching people.

Point 3: Support for vulnerable people and essential services must be prioritised

Water outages and extreme heat cause spikes in vulnerability and knock-on effects: business closures, health deterioration, sanitation breakdown, environmental damage. Priorities include triaging needs and ensuring water access for vulnerable households; using VCFSE groups for distribution, welfare checks, and situational awareness; maintaining responder capability when staff are also affected; managing sanitation safely (waste, nappies, rivers, alternative toilets); and, preventing exploitation, hoarding, and unsafe behaviours.

On Question 2, the top three points on working with civil society to address complications when switching the water back on were:

Point 1: Prioritise, scale, and communicate risk clearly

Participants emphasised the need to focus on what truly matters and scale the response appropriately. Also important is to make sure that stakeholders understand normal or expected risks, so nothing feels surprising or disproportionate.

Point 2: Define and share what "recovery" looks like

What a successful recovery means in practical terms requires clarification. Participants underlined the importance of providing concrete information, so everyone knows the path forward and what to expect.

Point 3: Engage stakeholders early to secure buy-in and reduce impact

Bring people into the conversation as far upstream as possible to shape messaging and secure resources. Such early involvement helps prevent disproportionate impacts and strengthens alignment among all the stakeholders.

The opportunity ahead and how we grab it

The final conference session considered the following question in parallel to hearing lightning talks and reflections from our four panellists representing national government, a national "network of networks" organization, and a Local Resilience Forum trailblazer:

- 1) What should be the next steps (by whom)?

The top three points raised were:

Point 1: UK needs a coherent national framework - not fragmented local effort

Duplication across resilience partnerships and local projects shows the limits of a bottom-up-only model. There is a need for nationally led visible campaigns (curriculum, TV, public messaging) and greater investment in civil contingencies. The absence of a national emergency agency or equivalent coordinating body leaves a gap between community resilience, local preparedness, and national strategy.

