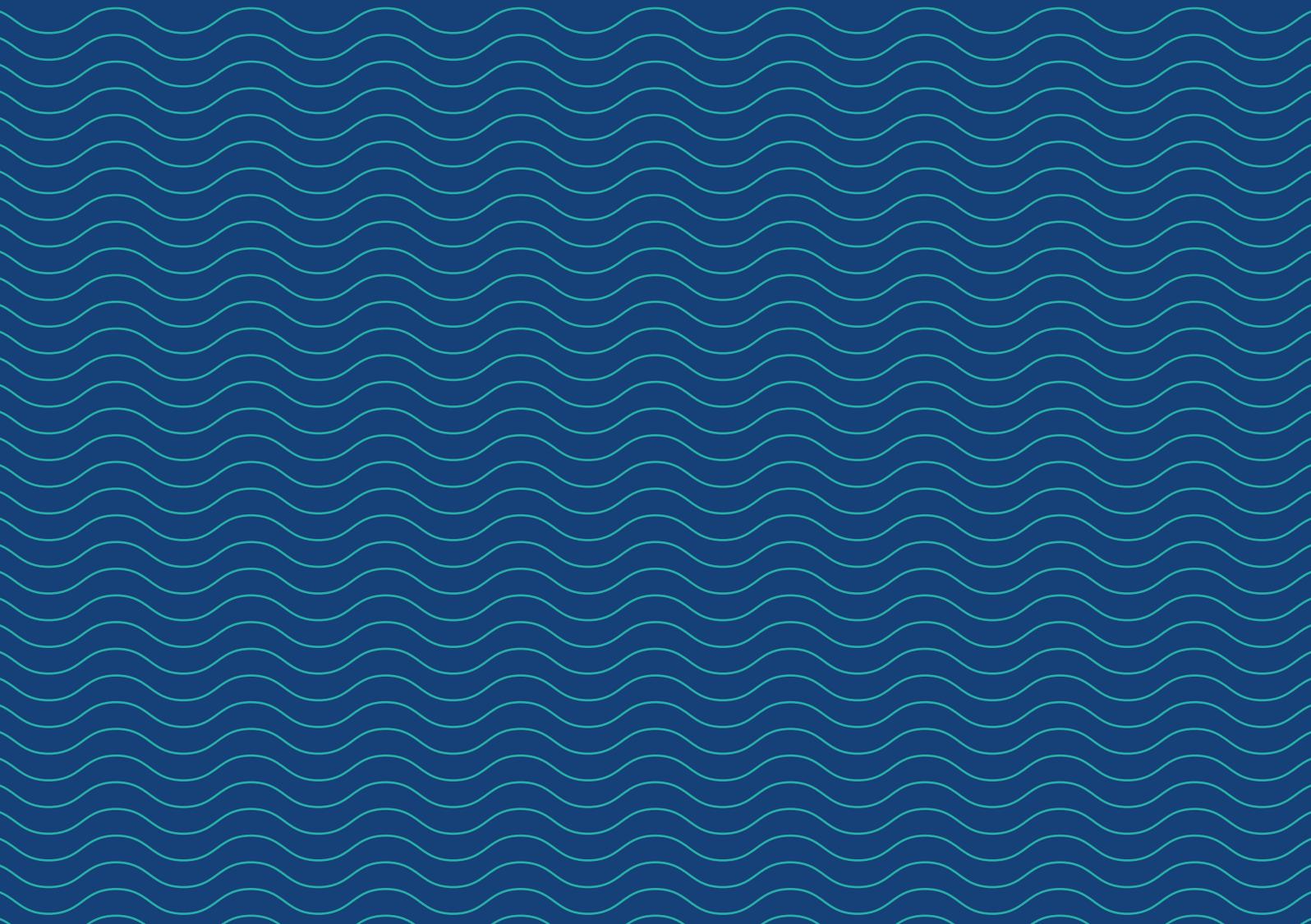


IMPOWER

CCN

COUNTY COUNCILS NETWORK

**RIDING THE WAVES:
STRENGTHENING
COUNCIL RESILIENCE**



Foreword



Jon Ainger
Director, IMPOWER

'Personal' resilience has become an increasingly popular topic as a collection of apps, courses, training, wellness articles and mindfulness approaches have flooded the market. The pandemic of course heightened this trend, and these resources have been crucial to help people to deal with the impact of restrictions and lockdowns.

'Organisational' resilience however has not had the same level of focus, and this needs to change. We define organisational resilience as the ability to anticipate, adapt to and bounce forward from disruption.

Our book, The EDGEWORK Manifesto (published in late 2019, just before the pandemic hit) sets out that public sector systems are complex in nature, and subject to ongoing disruption. It is our contention that the public sector can be well-prepared, or poorly-prepared, to cope with these disruptive events, and that their ability to cope has very little to do with the amount of financial reserves available – although of course money does help. It is also our belief that resilience can be deliberately invested in, and that the choice to do so (or not) is down to local leaders.

“It is our belief that resilience can be deliberately invested in, and that the choice to do so is down to local leaders.”

Of course, there is no statutory framework telling local leaders what to do. So, building on our EDGEWORK approach, during the autumn of 2020 we decided to use the pandemic as a learning opportunity – to design, test and iterate a resilience framework with eight local authorities. As the biggest disruptive event in decades, it has been extremely revealing of the underlying strengths and challenges facing the sector.

IMPOWER's Resilience Framework is designed specifically for public sector organisations managing large, complex systems where disruptions, small and large, occur all the time. It is grounded in academic research into what makes complex systems inherently resilient, and via some real-world testing and learning, we have translated this into a practical toolkit for leaders of local public services.

A huge thank you to the CCN for helping us identify the volunteer participants, and to the participants for contributing their precious time during an extremely challenging period. We are delighted to now share version one of the results of the work. We intend to continue to iterate and improve the framework – so watch this space.



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About us

CCN

Founded in 1997, the County Councils Network is the voice of England's counties. A cross-party organisation, CCN develops policy, commissions research, and presents evidence-based solutions nationally on behalf of the largest grouping of local authorities in England.

In total, the 23 county councils and 13 unitary councils that make up the CCN represent 25 million residents, account for 39% of England's GVA, and deliver high-quality services that matter the most to local communities

The network is a cross-party organisation, expressing the views of member councils to the government and within the Local Government Association.

IMPOWER

IMPOWER is an award-winning independent consultancy focused exclusively on improving public services. By enabling our clients to grip the challenges of complexity, we supercharge their ability to improve lives and save money.

At the heart of our work is respect for the users of public services and the staff who work in them, and a belief in the importance of unlocking their contributions to positive change.



1. Introduction

Organisational resilience is misunderstood and underestimated

Covid-19 has undeniably pushed councils to their limits to overcome ongoing challenges. Their ability to respond agilely and bounce forward from these waves of challenges is a testament to their resilience and willingness to grasp everyday disruption. Organisational resilience has traditionally been narrowly framed as either personal resilience at scale or the ability to 'keep going'. Our work challenges this view.

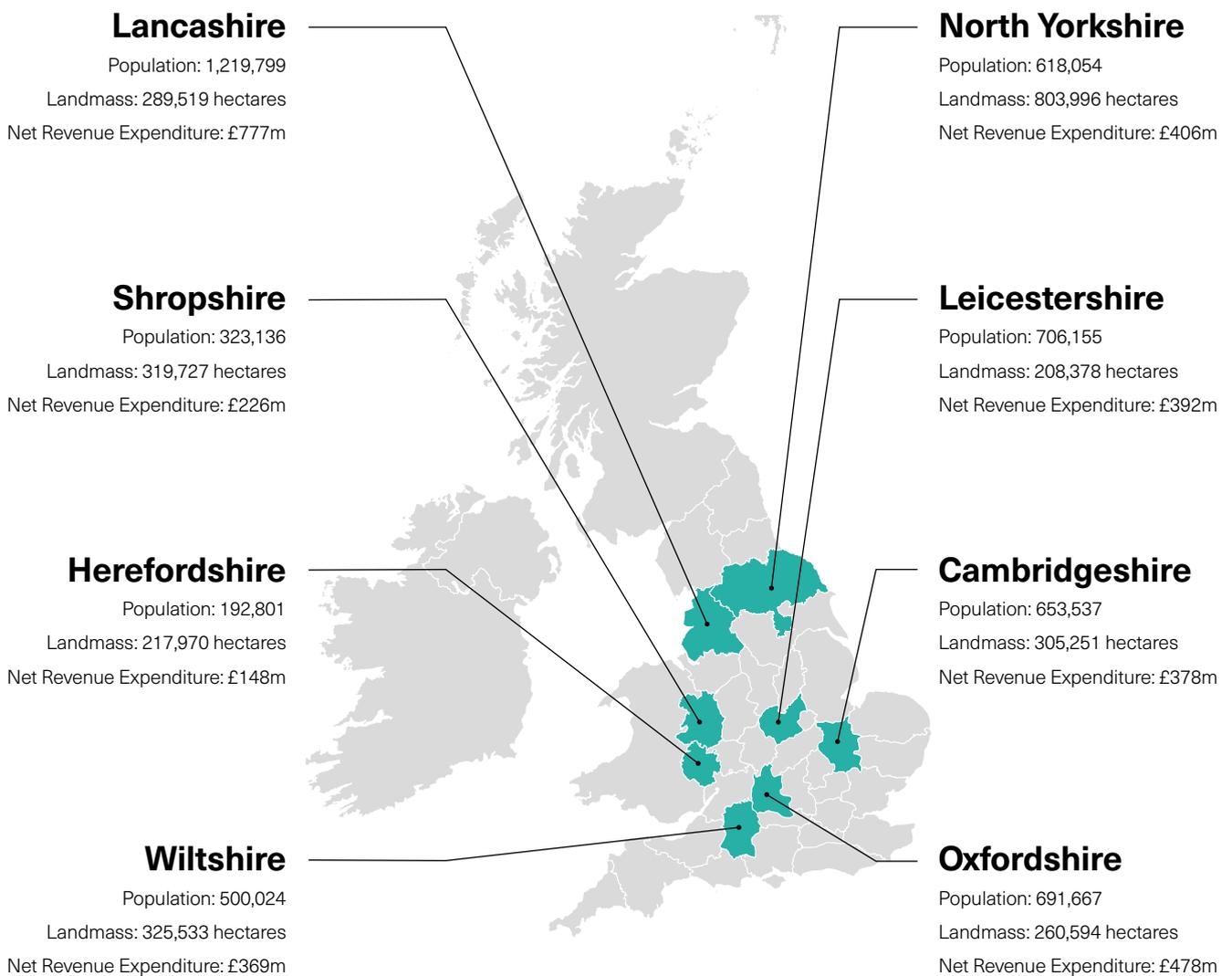
The next year is critical. Delivering on recovery, revised budget trajectories, and delayed transformation activity will be at risk in organisations exhausted by the pandemic, and without reserves of resilience to draw upon. We are calling on councils to fundamentally rethink how they understand organisational resilience and to actively invest in resilience now.

We have partnered with the County Councils Network to develop a framework to ascertain a council's resilience levels. Our understanding of organisational resilience was initially informed by academic literature and has gone through several iterations based on testing and feedback from a number of organisations and individuals.

The framework was informed by data and conversations with the eight participating councils, and revealed some of their key resilience strengths and areas to focus attention. We have since worked with an additional three councils to develop the framework. The resulting insight is a snapshot of their status in November 2020 – a uniquely revealing time.



The councils involved in developing the IMPOWER Resilience Framework are a wide range of county councils and unitary authorities. They share similar characteristics but are geographically spread across the country and have a diverse range of organisational characteristics.



2. Understanding organisational resilience

Resilience is the ability to respond to disruption, and this is core business for a council

Organisational resilience is the ability to anticipate, adapt to and bounce forward from disruption.

Organisational resilience has been misunderstood and narrowly framed as either personal resilience at scale, or the ability to 'keep going'. Personal resilience is the ability to cope with the negative effects of stress, and avoid mental health problems. Whilst there is an interdependency between organisational resilience and personal resilience, enhancing personal resilience of staff alone puts a misplaced onus on individuals.

The ability to persevere or 'keep going' is important, but it does not enable councils to adapt and build back stronger. If councils continue to function in this way, it will lead to exhaustion and this could potentially turn into an energy crisis if not dealt with.

Disruption is part of the core business of a council, given the uncertainty of complex systems.

In complex systems, situations can be difficult to predict and anticipate. This uncertainty can lead to waves of disruptions. Resilience is needed to anticipate, adapt and bounce forward from all these disruptions.



The EDGEWORK Manifesto articulates how leaders can deliver demand management change and impact in complex systems – we now need to build resilience into that complexity.

Covid-19 is one of the largest crises we will experience in our lifetimes, yet councils experienced everyday disruption long before the pandemic. A poor OFSTED report, a surge in demand, or provider failure are all examples of unexpected disruptions – resilience must be embedded across the organisation to deal with these situations effectively.



“This requires both adrenaline and core strength”



Adrenaline enables an absorptive response, a surge of energy to get through the initial shock and stress.



To keep riding the waves of disruption, recover more quickly between each one, and bounce back stronger needs more than adrenaline – it requires core strength, which is built through adaptive and anticipatory capabilities.

The ‘marathon vs sprint’ metaphor has been used by many in relation to the pandemic but, for us, ‘adrenaline vs core strength’ is a more useful comparison. This is not a marathon. There is no finish line. Our work with local authorities has sharpened our definition to recognise that disruption is part of the core business of a council. Disruptions will keep coming, large and small, with varying time gaps in between. Like a surfer, councils need to ride the waves.

Councils need to change their mindset, to view resilience as a capability rather than a response to an event. Councils cannot keep going on adrenaline alone. Vast amounts of energy (adrenaline) are certainly needed in the initial response to a crisis, but bouncing back stronger requires core strength, which enables councils to keep going for longer and to recover more quickly. They must draw from their core strength to be able to keep riding the waves.



3. IMPOWER's Resilience Framework

Our framework identifies the capabilities and characteristics of resilient organisations

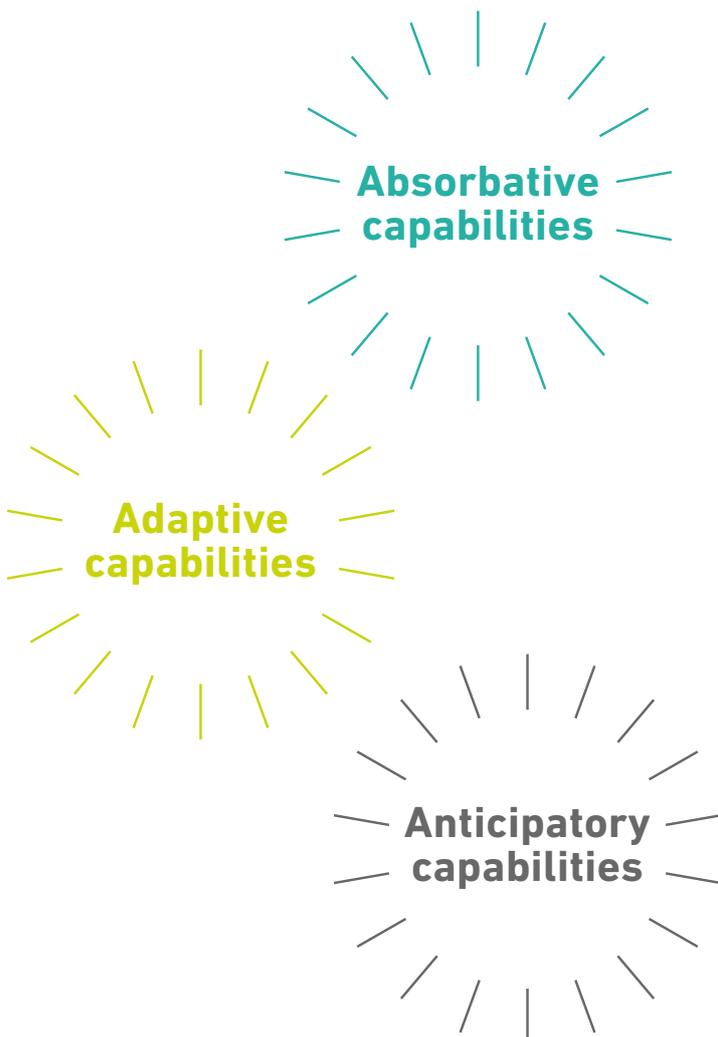
As a result of the interviews and subsequent analysis, we have identified six key characteristics of a resilient organisation where absorptive, adaptive and anticipatory capabilities are required. Building these capabilities for each characteristic will enable councils to be resilient.

Characteristics of a resilient organisation:

- Strong leadership and decision making
- Staff engagement, empowerment and wellbeing
- Learning driven improvement and innovation
- Leveraging finance and performance intelligence
- Resource flexibility
- Effective and collaborative relationships

A resilient organisation therefore requires three distinct capabilities:

1. **Absorbative capabilities:** to undertake rapid change to be able to keep going during a shock
2. **Adaptive capabilities:** to make incremental changes to be able to move forward
3. **Anticipatory capabilities:** to ensure positive changes are sustained and optimised, and to prepare for future disruptions



4. Analysis of council resilience levels

Councils are stronger at applying absorptive capabilities, rather than adaptive or anticipatory capabilities

The data provided by councils, alongside initial conversations, contributed to the development of the framework. Further conversations with them revealed some of their own key strengths in relation to resilience, as well as areas requiring attention. It is important to note that as the work progressed, the framework was iterated and refined - therefore there are some gaps in the evidence gathered.

The analysis indicates that, overall, councils have strong absorptive capabilities. This reflects a clear prowess in maintaining operational standards, safety and delivery, and reinforces that they have the skills to persevere and keep going during a disruption.

Anticipatory capabilities are the least well-developed, with many councils finding it difficult to create the capacity to sustain and optimise positive changes, or prepare for future disruptions.

The impact of this profile is playing out during Covid-19 and willingness is trumping wellbeing. Despite councils promoting staff wellbeing, the willingness of dedicated staff to push themselves to their limits, relying on adrenaline, has resulted in fatigue. This could turn into an energy crisis over the coming year.

“Despite councils promoting staff wellbeing, the willingness of dedicated staff to push themselves to their limits, relying on adrenaline, has resulted in fatigue.”



“Organisational resilience can be deliberately invested in and nurtured”

Many councils have deliberately invested in developing their adaptive and anticipatory capabilities to enhance their core strength and increase their resilience. This can be seen in building wellbeing cultures, investing time in system leadership, and developing strong information systems to maintain a financial grip.

Councils have also started to highlight capabilities they want to strengthen going forward, as Covid-19 has revealed gaps in their abilities. Reimagining the council's estate and ways of working has been mentioned by most participating councils, and some are also considering how they distribute practice specialisms and how to build on their increased ability to leverage data.

Reflections from participating councils

“Over several years we have been building a culture where people feel good working here, where they feel valued, motivated and engaged.”

“We went into this crisis on a sound relationship footing...the team are very well networked with key people locally.”

“You need to start with the financial systems in place or you're always trying to catch up.”

“We were already moving from an office space estate to a team space approach.”

“This is an opportunity to review and reimagine our estate and ways of working.”

“In the recovery plan we want to ensure we have a more multi-skilled workforce.”

“In the last few months, we have used information I've never seen before, thought of asking for, or known was available. Makes me rethink what we need outside of a pandemic.”



5. Celebrating council resilience

“We made a decision to invest £1m in PPE. This would normally take three weeks but it took two days.”

“In Children’s Services we have information from across the partnership which informs the demand model and enables us to project demand.”

As the context for each council differs, each has a unique profile. Councils need to understand their own profile to ascertain which capabilities they should enhance to become more resilient going forward. Nevertheless, there are some commonalities that have emerged from our assessment of eight councils.

- **Governance has been flexed successfully to respond to recent disruptions due to trust between officers and members.** Councils immediately reconfigured their operations to enable them to respond to the emerging crisis. This was possible due to clear and regular communications, and the trust and respect that had been built between officers and members.

- **Accurate and timely financial and performance information is available to inform strategic and operational decision making and this extends to disruption specific information.** Most councils felt they were able to maintain a financial grip as strong financial systems were already in place. Councils were also able to track demand, understanding how demand was changing and the implications of this on service delivery – including the impact on in-year budget and savings plans.
- **The workforce was mobilised and shared at the start of Covid-19 and staff were supported to complete critical tasks.** One council established a temporary staffing agency and mapped critical roles to the skills of people available for redeployment, which enabled them to successfully redeploy up to 900 employees. Most councils’ IT infrastructure has held up to the challenge of mobile working, as they had either already modernised or quickly accelerated existed plans. This is thought to be partly due to the large geographical areas they cover.



- Staff engagement and wellbeing have been at the forefront of councils resilience.** All councils evidenced good communication with staff, with regular formal and informal two-way communications, visible leadership, and live pulse checks during webinars. One council that was particularly strong had been through a leadership programme which created a culture of staff engagement and wellbeing. Another council already had a culture of knowing their staff, so they were aware of circumstances where home was not a safe environment and arranged for those people to be office-based from the start.
- Open and constructive dialogue with system players has been maintained during the crisis and relationships strengthened.** One council has adopted a 'One Team' approach across the system which has brought them closer, working with each other for the benefits of local citizens. This has arisen out of a strong foundation as significant time over the past few years has been dedicated to actively building relationships. Other councils spoke about relationships having improved during the crisis, with more frequent contact having brought them closer together. For many councils, the relationship with providers has been enhanced during the pandemic, with greater communication and information sharing, and discussions on how to adapt together. Councils have worked in partnership with the voluntary and community sector and community groups, combining their resources, skills and networks to help people most in need. There is a recognition that councils need to work effectively at a local level together, with local people. Many are looking at how to optimise these enhanced relationships going forward, embedding more community-led approaches and local empowerment for the longer term.

“We've invested in wellbeing support for staff and, just as importantly, over several years we have been building a culture where people feel valued, motivated and engaged.”

“What we have done with the district councils has been fantastic. We have been motivated by doing the right thing by people regardless of which organisation we work for.”



6. Lessons for the sector

- **Decisions about delivering non-essential activity have mainly been avoided, with the default being to deliver all services when government rules allow.** Government rules during the first lockdown released capacity and enabled staff resources to be flexed. However, with this removed the default tends to be to continue to deliver all services and activities, avoiding decisions about what the best action is given the rapidly changing local context and capacity.
- **Staff are not typically skilled in transferable capabilities and practice specialism is not widely distributed, leaving councils vulnerable when needing to fill key roles.** Councils recognised that they did not have people with the right skills available to undertake the roles required. This applies to delivering new tasks, as well as to having to work differently. Concerns were raised about succession planning, with the pandemic highlighting the risks when an individual is not available.
- **Capacity to reflect on disruptions and act on the insight is not available, and few councils are actively nurturing cultures that foster innovation.** Some councils have found it hard to carve out space to gather lessons learnt with the risk that this is not being incorporated into the organisations knowledge base and acted upon. The lack of innovation culture in some councils has resulted in staff not being confident making decisions during the unknown environment of Covid-19 and escalating operationally.
- **Half the councils feel they need more effective forecasting and horizon scanning capabilities to determine future trends and to identify early signals of an encroaching disruption.** All councils are undertaking some form of forecasting and horizon scanning, but 50% feel that this is a general weakness in local government and public sector.

“We know we’ll always need people-facing staff and skills in any crisis – so we could proactively upskill people who are less people-facing.”

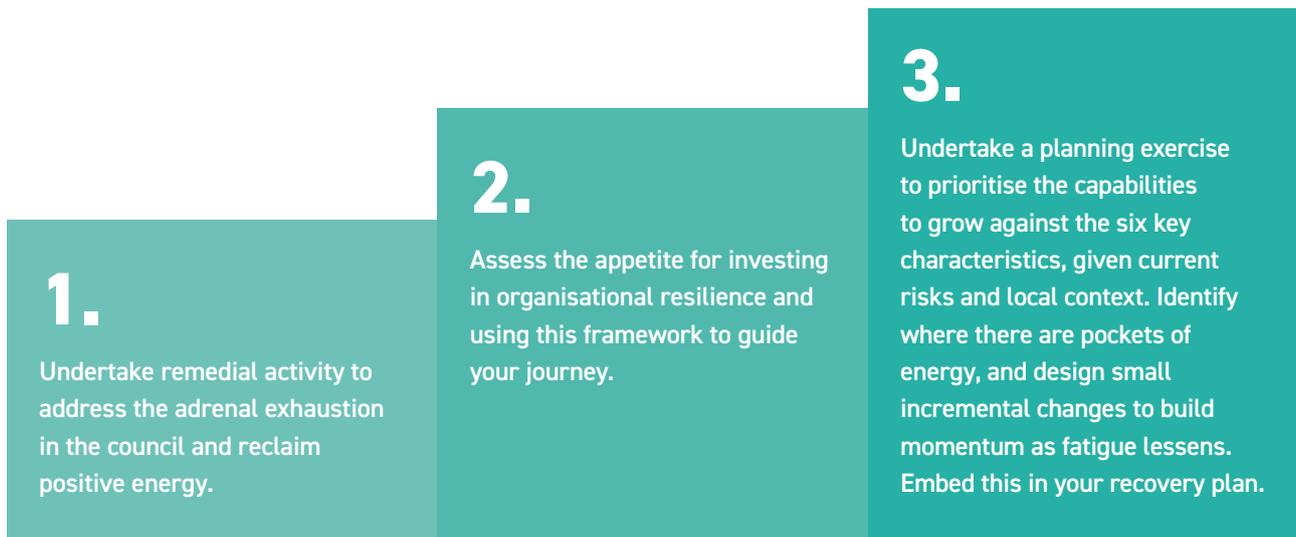
“We need to be more disciplined in writing down learning, and taking a pause to celebrate rather than moving on too quickly.”



“Investing now in resilience as an organisational capability”

The next year is critical. Delivering on recovery, revised budget trajectories, and delayed transformation activity will be at risk in organisations exhausted by the pandemic and without reserves of resilience to draw upon. Councils cannot keep running on adrenaline alone. Councils can either experience burnout or take the opportunity to build back better – improving their core strength and changing how they

respond to disruption. Investing in resilience is not a statutory requirement, it is a deliberate leadership choice to enable the council to deal more effectively with future disruptions and to be in a better position to operate within complexity. We propose three steps that will support councils to transition to, and build upon, their reserves of core strength:



In addition, given the analysis undertaken to date, there are four areas we advise all councils to be bold with to initially enhance their resilience:

- 1.** Create leadership capacity to make decisions, allocate time for planning and grip delivery of change under the recovery mantle
- 2.** Take difficult decisions on ceasing activity
- 3.** Leverage your intelligence so decisions can be informed by evidence
- 4.** Rigorously gather the learning to identify and exploit improved practice and new opportunities



7. Our resilience journey – reflections from participating councils

CAMBRIDGESHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL



Amanda Askham

Director of Business Improvement and Development,
Cambridgeshire County Council



Like all councils, Cambridgeshire County Council worked at pace and with agility during the pandemic to respond to needs and situations which were completely new to us. To do this, we pulled on foundations that were already in place: strong local knowledge and understanding of place; excellent partnership, system and shared arrangements; commitment to mental health, wellbeing and inclusivity in our workforce, and; a robust IT infrastructure. And, of course, we worked alongside our communities and voluntary sector partners like never before.

We have captured learning throughout the pandemic and understand that the triangle of strategic leadership, system relationships and an adaptable and resilient workforce has been, and will continue to be, critical to successful response. We also know it will be even more critical in the following months and years as we consider what it means to be a high performing council in a vastly changing context.

This project with IMPOWER and the County Councils Network has helped us reflect on why these foundations worked for us. This investment in resilience will help us to nurture the elements that will protect the council, and therefore the public, from future shocks.

The feedback from the study highlighted strengths across a number of areas and – although, of course, positive feedback and validation is always affirmative – the important thing for us has been to really study these strengths and to keep developing and tending to them as ‘anchor points’ of our resilience.

Strengths included:

Strong leadership and decision making with unity of purpose. The project highlighted the council’s ability to initiate a rapid response to Covid-19 and adapt its decision making to effectively absorb the disruption. Good levels of trust and respect between officers and members was key to this, with officers recognising the legitimate challenges they receive from members.

The council’s support for staff wellbeing, engagement and empowerment. This included evidence of how this translated, through to our ability to deploy staff at short notice to fill urgent business needs. We proactively stepped up existing training and support for mental health and wellbeing, and focused on frequent and varied opportunities for open communication.



Learning-driven improvement and innovation, underpinned with good leverage of finance and performance intelligence. There is widespread understanding of opportunities presented by pandemic disruption, with initiatives being planned to enable a step-change against strategic priorities and transformation plans to ensure they continue to fit into a new and better future. This is supported by a strong ability to monitor and use disruption-specific finance, performance, and demand information close to real-time, and turn it into actionable insights.

We have been enormously grateful to the other councils who contributed to IMPOWER's Resilience Framework and shared their own approach to strengthening organisational resilience. Local government is brilliant at sharing learning generously – with acknowledgement that what works in one place doesn't always 'lift and shift' to another. IMPOWER's Resilience Framework helps us to identify where we have gaps or areas for further development, and the learning and examples from other councils have given us ideas and – most importantly, confidence – to invest in our future resilience.

As always, it has been a pleasure to work with colleagues from IMPOWER and the County Councils Network and we look forward to seeing how the framework is used and developed.



LANCASHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL



Angie Ridgwell
Chief Executive Officer and
Director of Resources, Lancashire
County Council



Like all councils, Lancashire operates in complex systems - adapting strategy, structures and processes in response to the challenges that face us. Looking back, it is clear that some of our planned organisational changes were validated as we entered the pandemic, which escalated their delivery at a pace not always present in large organisations.

It is pleasing that many aspects of our organisational and technical infrastructures, cultures and behaviours acted as enablers in absorbing and adapting to the dramatic changes required by the pandemic. The work we had already done with our staff as part of our improvement journey meant they were prepared for the leadership challenge and operational re-alignment to emerging incident. Our elected members were also fantastic, supporting expedited decision making and governance arrangements.

Equally rewarding was the partnership working in the county. Our strengths, as a collective of organisations, meant that we absorbed the disruption and swiftly adapted to new ways of working.

Our response to the pandemic was characterised by a series of incremental innovations including:

Resource flexibility

- We redeployed 900 members of staff by creating a Temporary Internal Staffing agency, inviting volunteers to submit their interest and skills. Existing business continuity plans allowed us to make rapid decisions about which services to expand, continue or pause and quantify the delta in roles. We were then able to match these needs to the skills of our staff and repurposed resources at pace with appropriate training and support.
- There was also a recognition that some external support was required, and where necessary additional posts were recruited to. Lancashire intends to maintain the skill-mapping process securing the flexibility and agility as part of our core strengths for the future.

Staff engagement, empowering and wellbeing:

- Wellbeing messages (supported by senior leaders) were strengthened, and targeted initiatives put in place to ensure staff felt confident and secure as they continued to serve our communities. Under the principle “if you can work at home you should work at home”, managers were encouraged to speak to team members about their personal situations and design bespoke, risk-assessed solutions.



- Clear messaging about the importance of taking leave, sticking to working hours, taking regular breaks and ensuring outdoor exercise happened in the daylight, all formed part of the programme. We also recognised the loss of social interaction and replicated this through an algorithm which paired people up for a virtual coffee (or brew as we prefer to say in Lancashire).
- With increased recognition and 'shout-out' pages on our intranet, the feedback and engagement from staff has been fantastic.

Moving forward we will build in core strength with added focus on horizon-scanning (meerkat mode) and better capacity for scenario planning. We continue to create an environment where all staff understand the contribution their role plays in meeting our ambitions for Lancashire and making a meaningful difference to people's lives, and where they feel confident and empowered to do the best job possible.

We are absolutely clear we will take the learning we have gained from the pandemic and build this into practice, whilst ensuring we have the organisational elasticity to enhance our strategic capabilities and respond successfully to the challenges of the future. We all understand the relentless pressure on public services that Covid-19 has caused.



LEICESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL



John Sinnott
Chief Executive
Leicestershire County Council



For Leicestershire, we have learned a great deal about our strengths: in leading the county through a prolonged crisis, prioritising critical services, working in parallel on a recovery strategy, and building stronger partnerships than ever.

Whilst there is much to be proud of locally, Covid-19 has highlighted the fragility of councils. To put it simply: without central government funding many councils would have failed this past year.

For at least a decade, council budgets have been eroded. In Leicestershire, as the lowest-funded council this financial pressure is more acutely felt. The prioritisation of frontline service delivery has increased the impact of 'one off' emergency events such as Covid-19.

Another key issue for the sector is the availability of qualified, competent staff who can rapidly step into emergency management roles and lead day-to-day services during a crisis event.

Fortunately, Leicestershire has qualified and competent staff in dedicated resilience roles, and there are many examples of individuals 'stepping up', but this has stretched existing capacity. In addition, the capabilities to manage response and recovery in a sustained and long-lasting crisis have not been routinely recruited to, or developed, within the sector.

Finally, the resilience of a place and its public services relies upon a wider sector response than just councils. The Local Resilience Forum arrangements are crucial and should be mobilised at speed.

That said, it is well understood that Local Resilience Forums were designed and funded to support time-limited emergency incidents (such as floods, terrorist attacks or cyber incidents). The skills and tools available to manage a considerably longer incident has put considerable pressure on the system. Central government must take into account existing local governance arrangements so as not to duplicate or confuse.

Covid-19 has been a real test of our organisational resilience, as well as our partnerships with the wider public, and voluntary and community sector. There has been much to learn from, and much to be proud of.



NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL



Gary Fielding
Corporate Director, Strategic
Resources, North Yorkshire
County Council



Resilience is more than a test of strength and capacity. It is about having the right leadership, attitude, partnerships, skills and resources in place to drive effective recovery at pace and adapt agilely in the face of adversity. You can only do that if you have well-drilled, robust, and trusted partnerships across sectors so you fully understand each other's strengths and capacity – and command a mutual respect that means everyone will go the extra mile.

Harnessing the energy, which already exists via strong professional relationships and established collaborative practices, enabled North Yorkshire to mobilise at pace. We were able to sustain that focus over an extended period while tackling multiple challenges – the pandemic, severe weather events, major infrastructure projects and the opportunities presented by Local Government Reorganisation.

There is an acute sense of identity and pride linked to the brand and values of North Yorkshire, and by harnessing that natural affinity we were able to establish 'Team North Yorkshire' and its single voice. This supported the sense that everyone, including residents and businesses, needed to play their part and allowed staff from across all responding agencies to share a collective spirit. Within hours of lockdown, our Stronger Communities team had contracts in place with 23 community support organisations. They in turn worked at grassroots level to lead on the huge community effort required to support the needs of such a sparsely populated county.

That same dedication and team spirit played out across health and social care partners where our adult social care team transformed their service model – redesigning a new hospital discharge system with health partners which would normally take months, in just two weeks. Years of working hard at developing strong and functional relationships with the NHS, CCG and care providers made this possible.

A strong multiagency approach through the Local Resilience Forum continued across enforcement and compliance with North Yorkshire Police, taking a very visible role in community reassurance. The county council's public health team was supported by district council environmental health colleagues and the county's own trading standards officers – all working together despite the backdrop of local government reorganisation.

We also restructured senior management resource and teams, where required, to deliver on the priority workstreams. Focused workstreams were established for support to the care sector, community support, PPE supplies, new ways of working for staff, local economy impact, and schools and early years. Senior management was tasked with leading these workstreams, which then reported into management board and daily Chief Executive-led meetings ensuring resources were prioritised, there was a clear strategy, actions were tracked and impact monitored – with data at the heart of decision making.



Elected members supported decision making and strong governance arrangements – delegating responsibility where appropriate and leading on weekly MP briefings and other important community facing areas. Members recognised that ‘normal’ decision making was simply not responsive enough so supported greater delegations to officers. Collectively, there has been a real can-do collaborative approach throughout the council and with partners – driven by the desire to support the public, businesses and staff even more in hard times. Together this strong and effective multiagency partnership approach made sure nobody was left behind.



OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL



Yvonne Rees
Chief Executive,
Oxfordshire County Council



Organisational resilience is at the forefront of the minds and agenda of every senior manager, leadership team and Cabinet right across the sector. For Oxfordshire County Council, the findings and feedback from our report are helping us to redefine and reposition our approach to organisational change and development, looking at the lessons learnt from our response to the pandemic and our longer-term planning for recovery.

Like all councils, we threw ourselves into absorbing the additional work and immediate activities required to respond to the pandemic. But we soon understood that our stamina and resilience – as both individuals and as an organisation as whole – would need support and maintenance. This included our capacity, and supporting and developing new ways of working – including forging deeper collaborative partnerships.

During the early summer of 2020, we kick-started an employee engagement and organisational development programme called 'Delivering the Future Together'. This programme had been long in the planning (as part of our established transformation programme) and after the initial Covid-19 response, we recognised that connecting and working with colleagues across the council would be key to maintaining resilience and engagement.

Rather than delaying the programme we pivoted, reflecting the context in how we shaped our interventions. We have now established a programme that at its heart seeks to engage staff at every level in building organisational learning. We ask, "what works well?" and "what could be even better if?"

During 2020, we held virtual workshops with over 600 colleagues and undertook a whole council engagement survey. We are using the results of both to shape our plans – redefining our approach to change, renewing our organisational values, embedding agile working and reshaping our development and training offers. We recognise that colleagues across the council want to feel connected to the organisation that they work for, while acknowledging that the future is always uncertain.

During this first phase of the programme, we have offered training to every senior manager, underpinning the importance of developmental conversations as part of our roles as managers. Our 12:3:2 framework sets out a model whereby we ask every manager to hold monthly one to ones, three developmental conversations and two team planning events a year, and we support this with training and action learning. We are recruiting and training internal organisational facilitators and champions to embed this approach up, down and across the council, supporting every line manager and supervisor over the coming months.

Our collaborative capabilities working with system partners were highlighted in the feedback report as a strength, and these have been further developed and embedded throughout our Covid-19 response. As part of our longer-term recovery planning, we will continue to work across the wider system to share experiences and lessons learnt, reflecting these in the next iteration of the council's corporate plan.



The IMPOWER Resilience Framework sets out the importance of absorbative, adaptive and anticipatory capabilities. We are now using the framework to develop the next phases of our change programme, and to continually refine and deepen our partnership and system working. The Senior Leadership Team is using the framework to inform its thinking about workforce capacity and capability as we look at the county post-pandemic – including continually improving our approach to partnerships, organisational development, change and employee engagement.



WILTSHIRE COUNCIL



Terence Herbert
Chief Executive,
Wiltshire Council



Since its formation as a unitary authority in 2009, Wiltshire Council has handled the response to, and recovery from, several incidents – including major flooding, the ‘Beast from the East’ snowstorm which trapped hundreds of people on the A303, the Novichok incidents and cyber-attacks on our digital infrastructure that came with it in 2018.

Staff have had to respond to fast-changing situations and work closely with other public sector partners, businesses and local communities to ensure that help is delivered where it is needed most.

Following major incidents, it has been standard practice to run debriefs with external facilitators and capture good practice that has emerged, as well as to reflect on any areas for improvement.

Some of the learning from earlier incidents has recognised that:

- Robust governance needs to exist even though you are operating in a dynamic environment;
- Thought should be given to recovery at the earliest opportunity, recognising that all the understanding will not be there;
- All key partners need to be around the table with appropriate authority and clearances;
- Whilst incidents may be unprecedented, you must plan ahead and have appropriate documentation in place where necessary;
- Managers should be able to dedicate resource and ensure backfill, ensuring that staff are rotated and relieved;

- Long-term and consistent support should be sought from government;
- We must learn from others, embrace knowledge and understanding;
- Leadership and strong relations between partners is essential and cannot be retrofitted;
- Whitehall will have a real demand for information;
- There is a need for proactive outreach to communities – multiple channels and targeted;
- It pays dividends to engage with the voluntary and community sector to solve problems together;
- Work should be kept non-political and overall system leadership is vital;
- Sentiment monitoring should be invested in, and;
- Response to recovery is not a linear process.

Whilst Wiltshire has benefitted from being a unitary authority in terms of its resilience – enabling a strong centre with clarity in decision-making arrangements – the pandemic has disrupted the delivery of council services across the board in a way that many previous major incidents have not. Services have been shut at short notice, social care visits have dramatically changed, outreach to young people has been reimagined, and staff have been redeployed from leisure, libraries and other services to work on everything from rehabilitation to temporary mortuaries and vaccinations. Investment in IT has borne dividends, and enabled a smooth transition to home working and online democracy with virtual council meetings.



Wiltshire has also invested in organisational and county-wide recovery. An organisational recovery strategy has been produced to optimise use of workplaces and workspaces; making effective use of technology and establishing clear job personas (settings-based and flexible, community-based and mobile). The pandemic has highlighted the importance of flexible staff and the focus is on establishing the governance, systems, culture and behaviour to embed this flexibility and develop the learning across the workforce.

Following the May 2021 local elections, Wiltshire Council is developing its next long-term business plan, as well as plans to deliberately invest in resilience and seize the immediate opportunities to reimagine services that are likely to exist only over the next six to nine months. We are aiming to get ahead of the message and ensure better use of data for early warnings on emerging issues, and enhance the focus on our stakeholder engagement and strategic partnerships to ensure they are on a strong footing for the future.



8. Reflections from CCN on securing long-term resilience



- 1. Long-term funding certainty** – in the lead up to the pandemic, councils have had no choice but to reduce investment in corporate resilience to prioritise expenditure on frontline services in response to austerity. Equally, over the last three years councils have had to rely on annual spending round settlements, providing little certainty and stability to plan effectively over the medium-term. To support sustained improvements in corporate resilience, the upcoming Spending Review must provide a financial settlement of at least three years, with a sufficient quantum of resources to enable councils to reinvest in corporate capacity to aid long-term resilience building.
- 2. Local flexibility and expectation management** – during a time of crisis, councils need the local flexibility to respond in the most appropriate way. At times during the past 15 months, councils have needed to divert resources and capacity across their organisations to respond to disruption, which inevitably has meant councils making decisions on which services and activities to prioritise. In developing effective corporate resilience strategies, councils need central government to recognise this, lowering expectations where necessary to enable councils to respond most effectively to crisis and disruption.
- 3. Encouraging a flexible approach to workforce** – the response to the pandemic has revealed new strengths within the workforce of councils, alongside lessons on the types of employee skills and attributes they will need to harness over the coming period. Moving forward, a key message from our engagement with councils will be striking the right balance between maintaining a focus on professional experts within council service departments, alongside a greater focus on a more generalist, corporate centre to enhance corporate resilience.
- 4. A mixed economy of service provision** – alongside a flexible workforce, a key feature of corporate resilience through a period of disruption and crisis has been the ability of councils to respond to use a mixed economy of service provision. Employees have been redeployed en masse to ensure service continuity and reinforce corporate responses to the pandemic. This can only be done most effectively when councils have the right balance between in-house, private and voluntary sector provision.



5. Place-based system leadership – councils are only as resilient as the wider organisations in the local system and the level of resilience within the local community. The interdependency of organisations across the public sector has been a crucial part of the local response to Covid-19, while the community response has demonstrated that councils can work closely with residents to enhance community resilience at the most local of levels. This system leadership has been a critical factor in response to the disruption of the past 15 months, and ensuring that councils are further enabled to grasp this place-based system leadership role will enable councils to be prepared for future shocks and crisis.



IMPOWER's Resilience Framework enables you to understand your council's ability to deal with disruption, and how to strengthen organisational resilience. We are offering the Framework under an 'Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike' Creative Commons licence. This license lets others remix, adapt, and build upon our work non-commercially, as long as we are credited and any new creations are licensed under identical terms. Please get in touch to gain access to the tool.



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