

National Resilience Strategy – Call for evidence

Submission from NAVCA



Executive summary

Our experience as a country, particularly during the past few years, demonstrates the we need to build more resilience, especially more resilient communities. **NAVCA and our members welcome the work being done to develop the National Resilience Strategy, and for the opportunity to contribute.**

Whether we have been responding to events that have affected a specific community – flooding, fires and acts of terror – or events which affect us all – the Covid-19 pandemic – **the VCSE sector has been at the forefront of both immediate emergency response and longer term recovery.** Organisations – more specifically, people – from across the VCSE sector step up, time and time again, and will continue to do so. The insight and expertise, connections and assets, commitment and goodwill of the VCSE sector are powerful resources which can be harnessed in the mitigation and preparedness stages of building resilience, as well as in immediate response and longer term recovery.

In this submission, NAVCA makes the case for integrating the local VCSE sector and, specifically, local infrastructure organisations, into resilience systems. Why?

We have used our detailed knowledge of local infrastructure and the wider VCSE sector to identify how the VCSE's contribution to resilience and all stages of planning and response could be strengthened and formalised.

Recommendation 1: That each of the 42 Local Resilience Forums should work with the local VCSE infrastructure organisation(s) within the area covered and ensure at least one local infrastructure organisation is a full member of the LRF, involved in every stage of emergency response (mitigation, preparation, response and recovery). The local infrastructure organisation(s) will operate as a connector to the wider local VCSE sector, developing relationships between other members of the LRF (and the LRF as a whole) with local community groups, voluntary organisations and charities who can contribute at the various stages of emergency response, in a range of scenarios.

Recommendation 2: That funding is provided to enable the VCSE sector to take a full part in the LRF; and to work with the sector locally to foster resilient communities, develop the connections and relationships which are needed and be a coordinator within the VCSE sector and between the VCSE and other sectors. This has been calculated at £50k per FTE liaison post within one local infrastructure organisation in each of the 42 LRF, plus programme management. The total investment in resilience for this work amounts to £2.6m per annum.

Recommendation 3: That legislation should be enacted which formalises the involvement of local infrastructure organisations, as key connectors to the local VCSE sector within Local Resilience Forums. Other levers should also be developed to ensure meaningful engagement, including through the planning process, guidance and other support for LRFs.

NAVCA is the umbrella body for **local infrastructure organisations**, which are place based charities leading the VCSE sector locally. We have over 180 member organisations covering the vast majority of local authority areas in England.

Our members are experts on the communities they serve. They have strong networks across geographical communities, as well as communities of interest and experience, including those that have experienced barriers to services. They are repositories of data, knowledge, relationships and connections with access to assets across their areas. Collectively they work with over 200,000 voluntary and community organisations each year.

The activities and impact of the VCSE sector, and specifically local infrastructure organisations, align directly with the needs set out in the call for evidence on the National Resilience Strategy:

1. Organisations across the VCSE sector are resourceful and creative. They have high impact, often working with very limited funds and other resources. The connections between organisations are synergistic: the impact of working together is greater than the impact of each organisation individually. Local infrastructure organisations nurture a culture here this happens and act as a catalyst for those connection to flourish.
2. Local infrastructure organisations are trusted by their VCSE sector and colleagues from both public and private sector, to make connections across their area, and to find a path into the appropriate areas of the VCSE sector. The VCSE sector is like an old town that has grown organically, with lots of hidden alleys and unexpected side streets than a carefully-planned new town laid out on a grid; local infrastructure organisations are highly effective map readers and guides to their local VCSE sector.
3. The VCSE sector is one of three sides of society's triangle. For the VCSE sector to play its part in maintaining stability of the triangle as a whole, in balance with the public and private sectors, we need a culture in which the VCSE sector is recognised, supported and promoted. A thriving local VCSE sector is crucial to all stages of emergency response and resilience; investment and support will ensure that it is still there when emergencies happen. Local infrastructure organisations measure the health of the VCSE sector in their area, helping identify early signs that additional support is needed either within the communities or within the sector.

We know, from past experience, that the VCSE sector is an essential part of our emergency response and recovery, and that it brings significant experience and assets to bear. It will continue to step up in emergencies and work to meet the needs and aspirations of communities, often in an organic, ad hoc manner, and that the local VCSE steps up despite sometimes patchwork or uncoordinated connection from the wider system. Our research shows that at present the engagement between LRFs and the VCSE, both local and national organisations, is patchy and often focused on life saving and first aid. **The new National Resilience Strategy provides an ideal opportunity to bring the VCSE sector's energy and resources in to resilience building at system level and a strategic approach will result in better outcomes for communities.**

Introduction

This submission has been prepared by [NAVCA](#), with additional material and insight gathered from NAVCA's [member organisations](#).

NAVCA is the umbrella body for local VCSE infrastructure organisations, which cover the vast majority of local authority areas in England. Our members provide:

- **leadership and advocacy** for the VCSE sector across the area they serve, making active contributions in statutory forums and boards, across local resilience, health and wellbeing, integrated care, children and adult services and other areas. For example, the local VCSE is embedded in emerging Integrated Care Systems leading health transformation.
- **community development, strengthening relationships and resilience.**
- **partnerships and collaboration**, bringing together VCSE organisations to work together and form connections, as well as leading projects, managing funding and showcasing impact and social return on investment.
- **volunteering** – fostering a thriving volunteer base locally through good practice and training; building a stronger and more inclusive culture within which volunteering can happen; connecting seldom heard communities; working to dismantle systemic barriers to voluntary action; and brokerage, matching individuals to organisations.

This submission also has the full support of [Locality](#), a registered charity which supports local community organisations to be strong and successful. Locality's national network of 1,400 members helps hundreds of thousands of people every week, through an offer of specialist advice, peer learning and campaign with members for a fairer society, to unlock the power of community.

Context: why resilience needs NAVCA and our member organisations

The VCSE sector is wide and varied, covering everything from palliative care to heritage railways. In relation to emergency response, it includes organisations working explicitly :

- for saving lives of people in immediate danger, such as mountain rescue, lifeboat teams;
- with a broad community-focussed remit around a place, which are key players in responding to crisis such as flood or major fire;
- with a national coverage for a specific cause or issue, such as working to prevent radicalisation;
- for specific communities of interest or experience, including those working on mental health conditions, physical illness, disabilities, co-morbidities; and
- with a more generalist approach.

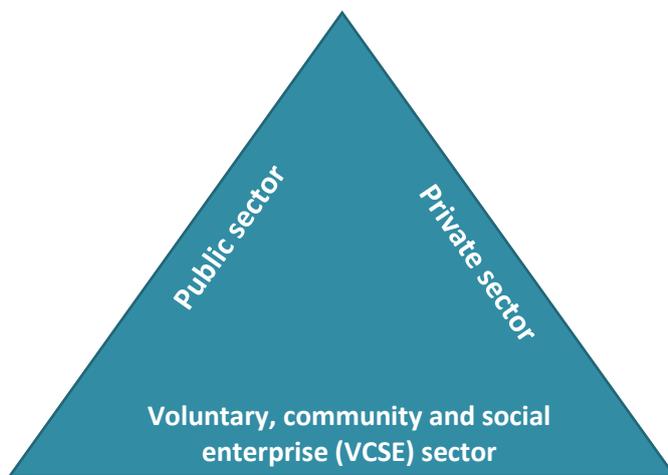
Each has their own place in an emergency response, and brings their own assets and strengths. This taxonomy is developed further in the VCS Emergency Partnership's response to this consultation.

NAVCA's submission to the call for evidence focuses on **the importance of local, place based organisations**, including NAVCA's members which are local infrastructure organisations. Local infrastructure organisations provide a highly effective route in to strong and diverse networks of local voluntary and community organisations, as well as the individuals driving social action. The resources that these networks hold include local knowledge, expertise, skills, volunteers, and effective communications and connections across

geographic, interest and experience based communities. These organisations have assets and resources in the community, and know their places in detail. Together they achieve much more than their individual resources would suggest.

Emergency response – and resilience-building as preparation – needs to bring local infrastructure organisations into the heart of every stage, supported with investment (see recommendations). to bring in their expertise and foster the conditions for resilient communities

Resilience, within communities, across communities and across the country, comes from the relationships between the three elements of society. These elements of modern society can generate and sustain immense resilience when they work together.



The public sector provides strategic direction and our essential services. The private sector supports our economy, providing jobs and revenue. The voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector brings people together and contributes to so many aspects of society: providing services and filling gaps that public and private sector cannot or will not address; connecting people who, for whatever reason, are excluded from or marginalised in economic activity; identifying and meeting community needs and aspirations. The VCSE sector brings

people together in communities, connects diverse communities together within a geography, and unites us as a country.

NAVCA’s member organisations empower and promote a thriving VCSE sector. As leaders in community development, they enable communities to make connections and have relationships, and foster a strong sense of place. That community resilience makes it far more likely that emergency response will be effective. Building resilience is a fundamental aspect of local infrastructure work – listening to communities to understand their needs and aspirations, connecting people and supporting the growth of relationships and activities.

Local infrastructure organisations provide specialist knowledge and expertise which facilitates people and communities’ journeys along that pathway. A local sustainable, stable and well-resourced local infrastructure organisation generates social capital, and the return on that investment is a deep, multi-layered and complex web of relationships built on trust, mutual understanding and respect. All this is crucial to fostering and growing the resilience of communities.

In major incidents prior to Covid-19 local infrastructure organisations demonstrated their value, and the way that they could draw in a whole range of organisations which had specific skills, expertise and resources to contribute to emergency response. They have also played a major role in short and long term recovery.

One example is the work done by NAVCA member [Kensington and Chelsea Social Council](#) (KCSC) in relation to the Grenfell Tower fire in 2019. KCSC set up the Grenfell Network Group, a collaboration of residents, councillors and voluntary agencies that emerged from a meeting organised by KCSC in the weeks following

the fire. KCSC also offered set-up support to people looking to establish new community organisations following the Grenfell Fire, helping with developing aims and objectives, setting up the legal structure of organisations and providing induction for trustees.

Local infrastructure organisations have been closely involved in numerous events including:

- [Macc](#) and the Manchester Arena bombing
- [Bolton CVS](#) and the fire at student accommodation at Bolton University
- [Cumbria CVS](#) and floods across Cumbria
- [Richmond CVS](#) and refugees arriving from Afghanistan
- [Hackney CVS](#) and the London riots, 2011

Local infrastructure and the Covid-19 pandemic

Local infrastructure organisations have shown their crucial role and activities through Covid-19, and the impact their work has on recovery as well as the immediate event. Responses such as that seen in Covid-19, or the other examples above, are most effective when there is a thriving local VCSE sector; which is brought together and coordinated by a local infrastructure organisation. Those relations and connections need to be developed before they are needed, and be developed universally across the country. The VCSE sector needs investment to be effective, especially for those organisations for whom emergency response is not their usual focus, but who nonetheless find themselves at the centre of it.¹

Local infrastructure organisations in particular have been central to the strategic response in many regions, working in partnership with LAs [local authorities] in order to ensure that the needs of the most vulnerable were met during a time of crisis. Infrastructure organisations in many areas took on responsibility for recruiting and mobilising huge numbers of volunteers. In some areas, this cross-sectoral working built on solid pre-existing relationships between LAs and the VCS [voluntary and community sector]... Elsewhere, we heard how the conditions of the pandemic presented an opportunity to move away from silo working that had long frustrated the VCS. For some infrastructure organisations, there was a sense that decision-making structures had been levelled which created a space for the VCS to shape local approaches.²

During the pandemic, local infrastructure organisations leveraged their relationships and networks to maximise the impact of the community response. NAVCA's members were vital to coordinating, bolstering, guiding and supporting the local VCSE sector effort. They were the connection between the VCSE sector, local authorities and health care systems, as well as connecting local VCSE sector organisations together. They amplified and escalated needs, ensuring statutory services were aware of those needs and responding appropriately. Primarily, local infrastructure organisations are a catalyst rather than a provider, and their work in this role enables others to deliver who have the specific skills and expertise but may miss the relationships and connections.

¹ McMullan J and McMillan R, [Stepping up: coordinating local voluntary sector responses to the COVID-19 crisis](#), Sheffield Hallam University/Centre for Economic and Social Research, September 2021.

² Social Policy Association, [Lessons from lockdown: valuing our voluntary and community sector](#), 23 November 2020

Alongside using these connections, many local infrastructure organisations also stepped outside their primary role and undertook a range of specific tasks and support including:

- coordinating and ensuring delivery of food, prescriptions and other medication to a wide range of vulnerable people (including those shielding);
- working with mutual aid and other community action groups to maximise their impact, help them overcome hurdles, such as ensuring that safeguarding of people in need and volunteers was in place, especially after early reports of criminals targeting people through offering ‘friendly help’;
- building digital connectivity to help children, young people, those shielding and the elderly – whether this was to continue to take part in education, or to help combat loneliness and isolation;
- enlisting, managing and supporting hundreds of thousands of volunteers and brokering volunteer offers with local organisations;
- helping to plan and deliver community testing, surge testing and, subsequently, vaccination services, engaging with diverse communities and ensuring testing and vaccination were delivered quickly and effectively.

As leaders in the community, our member organisations contributed to partnerships and collaborations with:

- local authorities
- local resilience forums
- primary and secondary care providers, as well as system wide NHS coordination
- schools, colleges and higher education
- private sector organisations, bringing them in to support communities in the most effective way

In some cases, existing relationships meant that the public sector and VCS could start to work together immediately and effectively, as there was already understanding, knowledge and mutual trust between the partners. In other cases, new relationships were forged at pace, under pressure and at a time when everyone involved was also personally affected, to some extent, by the developing pandemic. We learned very quickly that pre-existing relationships saved time and energy which was needed for the emergency response.

Local infrastructure organisations were crucial connectors between public services and the VCSE sector. Their ability to bring together different pieces of community ecosystems created synergies.

This case study, from NAVCA member Communities 1st in Hertfordshire, demonstrates how the local infrastructure organisation’s relationships and existing activities were put to use, to quickly understand and meet the needs of the communities which the organisation serves.

Communities 1st launched their Compassionate Community Connector Programme in March 2020.

Working with partner organisations (Welwyn Hatfield CVS and Volunteer Centre Broxbourne & East Herts), around 8,000 volunteers were recruited and trained in St Albans, Hertsmere, Welwyn Hatfield, Broxbourne and East, to deliver vital provisions such as shopping and prescriptions, offer telephone befrienders for vulnerable citizens who have been shielding, and deliver respiration equipment on behalf of GPs.

Communities 1st positively impacted communities' response to Covid-19, acting as connector between public services and the VCSE sector during the emergency. The multi-layered impact the organisation achieved can be seen through some case studies:

As the Hertfordshire Liaison Lead for the VCS Emergencies Partnership, Communities 1st were able to quickly respond to emerging issues as they arose. By working in partnership with the Essex Liaison Lead for the VCS Emergencies Partnership, Rainbow Services, they were able to assist the VCSE sector in Essex with hand sanitisers at a time when Essex were struggling to find any.

Using our in depth knowledge of the communities we serve, Communities 1st have delivered almost 5,000 lateral flow test kits to 54 religious organisations across Hertfordshire, helping to make the tests easily accessible to our diverse communities.

During the pandemic Communities 1st began hosting weekly 'virtual coffee mornings' for member organisations – charities, voluntary and community groups across Hertfordshire. As most people were working from home we were aware of an increased sense of isolation and lack of opportunities to share ideas and challenges with colleagues and other networks. The coffee mornings quickly became an invaluable opportunity to connect people and organisations and facilitate shared working. For example, one organisation was struggling to find a volunteer with a specific skill and another attendee at the meeting was able to offer this expertise.

Communities 1st have worked with 13 Mutual Aid Groups (MAGs) across Hertsmere and St Albans, providing specialist advice and guidance on a range of issues including safeguarding, cash handling and data protection. Our support enabled groups to quickly recruit volunteers and offer support to vulnerable residents. In addition, working closely with Communities 1st enabled the MAGs to signpost these residents on to the range of support offered by Communities 1st and our wider VCSE network.

In line with the augmented contact between volunteers and beneficiaries, an additional 3,000 people have been trained on safeguarding; and over 600 new dementia friends were trained.

As an example of how our differentiated services positively impact the wellbeing of the community, one of our volunteers spoke to an anxious 72-year old woman living alone with underlying health conditions, to support her in the use of her laptop. This first contact led to the woman to be registered for our telephone befriender, prescription collection and technical support (digital champion) schemes, effectively supporting her, helping keep her safe and making her happier through a difficult time.

Local focus, national impact

During the pandemic, local infrastructure organisations were able to identify trends within their local areas, understand how these may relate to what was happening in other regions and develop wider intelligence on the scope and scale of community needs. Concerns around digital exclusion, food insecurity, community inclusion and in particular mental health and wellbeing in communities were the most frequently noted area of growing and unmet needs. This intelligence was escalated and shared with the Government, to feed into policy and practical support. It was also shared with national emergency response charities, which could then allocate or redirect resources to provide the most effective and appropriate response.

This data capture was facilitated through NAVCA's network of members and also through the VCS Emergencies Partnership. Local infrastructure organisations drew on their existing networks, and were also supported through the introduction of new networks facilitated by the connections into the VCS Emergencies Partnership. Data was shared using 'State of the Sector' questionnaires, workshops and forums. The VCS Emergencies Partnership developed a system of exception reporting to provide organisations with an alert system for identifying vulnerabilities and pressing needs.

One NAVCA member organisation from the south west places this work in a wider context:

“From an intelligence perspective, this enabled us to see a bigger picture and compare and contrast our demands with those elsewhere in the UK. [It has] enabled us to demonstrate both the similarities and often the stark differences between us and other parts of the UK.”

Local Resilience Forums – mixed experiences

Having considered the terms of reference and questions set out in the call for evidence, NAVCA surveyed our members on their relationships with their local LRFs. We have focused on LRFs due to their central role in Covid-19 response and their According to the Civil Contingencies Secretariat, the members of LRFs:

“...have a collective responsibility to plan, prepare and communicate in a multi-agency forum.

“This responsibility is best fulfilled where the LRF is organised as a collaborative mechanism for delivery.”³

The call recognises the importance of a community response to any emergency – it is the local community which responds first and fastest, and which has greatest interest in recovery. The local VCSE sector needs to be at the centre of resilience and emergency responses, as key mechanisms to bring communities together, give shape and voice to that response. Local infrastructure organisations, in turn, facilitate and enable that to happen.

The local VCSE sector has a key role to play at each stage of resilience as set out:

1. Mitigation

Local infrastructure organisations and the wider VCSE sector are the canary in the coal mine. The knowledge and intelligence from local communities will often be the best indicator of an emergency, its scale and impact.

2. Preparedness

We have learned from successive emergencies, including Covid-19, that preparedness is key. Building relationships means that in an emergency we know who to go to, there is trust, and we can connect people, organisations and assets together. This critical area is weakest currently, and further investment is needed to generate significant improvement to responses down the line.

3. Mobilisation

³ Civil Contingencies Secretariat/Cabinet Office, [The role of Local Resilience Forums: A reference document](#), July 2013

The local VCSE sector is a source of assets – connections, relationships and trust; knowledge and intelligence; spaces, buildings, and other physical assets. Crucially they also have knowledge of vulnerabilities and psycho-social needs. Local infrastructure organisations know where these are, how to involve the wider VCSE sector and tap in to these resources, and how they connect together. This is key to effective emergency response.

4. Recovery

Local infrastructure organisations offer immense value in terms of their connections with varied and often seldom heard communities (geographical, as well as communities of interest/experience). They understand how best to communicate with and elicit responses from diverse communities on what recovery looks like for them, and how to match resources to needs. Covid-19 has demonstrated how an emergency affects different sectors of our community in a range of ways, and can entrench and reinforce inequality, as the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on some Black and minoritised ethnic communities shows.

Call for evidence: six thematic areas

1. Risk and resilience – strengthening our ability to manage an evolving risk landscape depends on improving our ability to both predict and adapt to identified and unexpected challenges.

The VCSE sector and, specifically, local infrastructure organisations are ideally placed to provide intelligence and early warning about risks which will potentially develop in the communities they serve. Their connections within and across a whole range of communities, some of them seldom heard, less confident or less prepared to engage with the system per se. The VCSE sector has often been described as ‘the canary in the coal mine’ detecting social issues and concerns ahead of other mechanisms, because of the sector’s connections in to diverse communities and this was particularly the case during Covid-19.

The VCSE sector supports the most vulnerable and marginalized communities in society, and we see the disproportionate impact that disasters have on these groups. Through NAVCA and the VCS Emergencies Partnership, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport funded the Local Infrastructure Network. This group comprises over 200 local infrastructure organisations, covering the whole of England, embedded within communities and with significant knowledge at place-based level to understand the needs – both emerging and pre-existing – that are exasperated by emergencies.

During the Covid-19 response, local infrastructure organisations used their knowledge to pivot and flex support to address gaps in need. NAVCA member Community Action Bradford and District (CABAD) developed a hugely successful information campaign which not only resonated with local communities but also gained traction nationally, picking up media coverage and widespread sharing.

The [‘Behind the mask’ campaign](#) utilised the connections CABAD and its network had with the communities they support. Debunking some of the myths surrounding Covid-19, the campaign told the story of real Bradford residents behind each mask, and the reality of how Covid-19 has changed

their life. For the campaign, CABAD enlisted diverse voices from the community which successfully targeted and encouraged vaccine take up amongst hesitant communities. The insights our sector can provide to government and emergency structures will be crucial for an effective response and recovery following the current spate of emergency events.

2. Responsibilities and accountability – it is fundamentally important that all those involved in building resilience have a clear understanding of when, where and how to apply tools, processes and relationships effectively

Involving at least one of the area’s local infrastructure organisations at the heart of the LRF is a simple, effective way to meet this objective in relation to understanding the tools, processes and relationships available for emergency response through the area’s local VCSE sector. Connecting the local VCSE effectively into the LRF and its work makes sure communities are at its heart; that they are listened to and their intelligence informs risk; and that the assets of the community contribute to emergency responses.

In a survey of NAVCA’s members, we asked about the involvement of the local VCSE sector with the LRF.

7. Where you have knowledge of VCS involvement in your local LRF, please tell us whether you think:			
Answer Choices	Yes	No	Response Total
The right number of organisations are involved	32.26% 10	67.74% 21	31
The right mix of organisations is involved	35.48% 11	64.52% 20	31
		answered	31
		skipped	0

We asked for additional comments about the involvement of the local VCSE sector in LRFs, and specifically, which organisations are missing from direct involvement. Most commented that the local infrastructure organisations were not involved. They also said:

“Most [are missing], apart from those classed as Emergency Participants.”

“Local charities [are missing]. Heavy focus on British Red Cross and some 4x4 groups that aren't connected with the wider sector.”

“Not reflective of the VCSE in our area. Old-fashioned approach. Felt irrelevant during Covid.”

“No involvement from the formal VCSE local sector only organisations with 'volunteers'.”

“Membership seems to be randomly selected rather than a considered approach.”

From our members’ response, it is clear that there is a need to strengthen/formalise the connection between LRF and the local VCSE sector, with the local infrastructure organisations acting as a trusted conduit. Too often, the LRF’s connection with the local VCSE sector is ad hoc, rather than strategically developed. In many cases, our members felt that the local VCSE sector was seen as “nice to have” or “not really necessary” element of emergency response, rather than a highly-developed and resourceful asset.

An additional comment is needed here on general understanding around volunteers. Voluntary action is a major resource for emergency response. We know that people are generous with their time and energy, and want to play an active part in helping within their local communities: the huge amount of voluntary action at local level during Covid-19 demonstrates this. We also know that in building resilience, volunteering works best as a relational, rather than transactional, activity. Major benefits from volunteering action stem not from the simple act of delivering a food parcel or giving someone a lift to a medical appointment. The relationships which develop between people build social capital. Furthermore, these relationships break down the artificial division between the ‘do gooder’ and the ‘needy or vulnerable recipient’ recognising that voluntary action is beneficial to everyone involved.

To be most effective, voluntary action needs active, professional management, where volunteers are actively engaged, relationships are developed, and people are matched to roles and organisations that they care about. Whether volunteers are using existing skills or developing new capabilities, they deserve to be valued, thanked and supported. Volunteers give their time freely, but without resources for volunteer management their experience may well be negative, engagement and relationships will not be developed, and their activity limited.

The consultation proposals recognise the value and importance community. To be harnessed most effectively, the local VCSE sector needs to be actively engaged. However our experience remains that understanding the potential of the sector, as well as willingness to develop a strategic relationship with it and realise the assets it can unlock, remains at best inconsistent. Investment is needed in the capacity of the VCSE sector to ensure it connects organisations together to enhance a local emergency response.

3. Partnerships – resilience is dependent on local communities, it is not solely a government or public sector responsibility. The local VCS plays an essential role in building our collective resilience.

Local infrastructure organisations and their networks have dedicated their entire existence to strengthening their communities by building and developing relationships, networks and activities that bring people together. Through the pandemic, and in other emergency scenarios we have tapped into it. But we need to do this more consistently and effectively, with forethought and intent. We want to make sure we build on what we have learned for future emergencies.

The VCSE sector comprises a wide range of experienced providers and services. Like the public and private sectors, it is a diverse set of organisations. The vast majority are small, locally based, often

with few or no paid members of staff, few tangible assets and fluid approaches. These small local organisations are key to connecting with and unlocking the potential of communities.

In addition to organisations focussed on place and their community there are a plethora of faith based organisations. These are deeply embedded in their community, and also need to be brought into planning and preparation.

We welcome the approach to working in partnership, and look forward to equal status and standing given to all sectors in preparing for, and developing a coherent response to, emergencies.

4. Community – a whole-of-society approach will be central to strengthening the UK’s resilience, with a revived effort to inform and empower all parts of society who can make a contribution.

Community is a loose affiliation of many different people and groupings. It exists as relationships between people on streets, in neighbourhoods, or who share a common interest. Communities in themselves function at many different levels, and we have seen through mutual aid groups that they self-organise and deliver significant impact.

We also know that communities can operate with greater impact and over a longer period where they have some structure around them. Community organisations can marshal significant assets (especially people giving their time), connect to wider organisations locally and nationally effectively, channel the needs, aspirations and hopes of people in them. In this form, with more structure we would refer to them as the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector, which differs a little from communities. Both are needed to develop engagement, connections and relationships. Typically, vulnerable and poorer communities need more support to develop robust connections and a thriving local VCSE sector. These are also the communities which typically have fewer assets to enable them to respond robustly to emergencies, and where development is most needed. Recent research shows that the most ‘left behind’ areas experience not only lower levels of economic activity and physical infrastructure, but also a lower level of charities (and by extrapolation, voluntary and community social action).⁴

We also know that communities are the connectors and experts in their locality. The structures and relationships within the VCSE sector develop organically, they are accountable to people locally, and a top down hierarchy is not always effective. This can make it difficult to access them, to connect with them effectively. Local Infrastructure Organisations offer an effective route to do that. They are trusted, independent organisations, with a mandate locally to build and connect the VCSE sector. One of their core functions is community development. They offer a conduit between the VCSE sector and local statutory sector.

This has come through forcefully in the Covid-19 response. The impact of the VCS Emergencies Partnership shows how synergy is created when we reinforce the local and community knowledge with the effective deployment of additional resources and expertise.⁵ To embed the local VCSE sector in resilience makes the response relational and long-term rather than transactional, which is short or, at best, medium term. It is about what we do together, rather than a service being

⁴ New Philanthropy Capital, [Where are England’s charities?](#) 16 Jan 2020.

⁵ McMullan J and McMillan R, [Stepping up: coordinating local voluntary sector responses to the COVID-19 crisis](#), Sheffield Hallam University/Centre for Economic and Social Research, September 2021.

“delivered to” individuals, neighbourhoods or communities. Mutual support builds resilience and long term impact. The partnership (between local community and emergency response for example) needs to be based on mutual understanding, trust and respect, regardless of discrepancy in terms of size/budget/resources.

Partnerships built in peacetime can plan for crisis. Partnerships built under fire are not as strategic or as effective. Local infrastructure organisations are ideally placed and are experts in partnership building and collaboration, often bringing seemingly unconnected/disparate groups together and creating synergy. Developing capacity at local level means investing in resilience and will pay dividends. Our recommendation is a core place for at least one of the relevant local infrastructure organisations at each LRF to build relationships between the VCSE and statutory bodies. To maintain trust and recognise the independence of the local VCSE sector, the local VCSE must be able to determine which organisation(s) take this role.

This work needs to be supported by funding for one FTE post in each LRF area, located within a local infrastructure organisation. That post will provide a connection and interface with the emergency response. Perhaps more importantly, it will invest in understanding and connections locally, bringing the VCSE sector together, understanding need, helping the sector to grow. It also means supporting the VCSE to make the connections and relationships consistently over time, to support and promote a thriving voluntary sector.

5. Investment – the challenge of where to place investment in the risk cycle is on that affects the public and private sectors alike. As government, individuals and businesses we face choices around what, and how much, to invest.

Investing in sustainable, stable, well resourced local infrastructure organisations offers high levels of return. The work of local infrastructure organisations builds social capital across the local VCSE sector which is a key feature of resilient communities. Economic benefits are also generated: volunteers who are seeking to rejoin the labour market develop additional skills and experience; voluntary and community organisations working in health and social care reduce pressure on the NHS and local authorities; young people’s organisations help improve self-esteem, reduce risky behaviour and anti-social behaviour, and divert young people away from potential contact with the criminal justice system. This frees up public sector resources and also supports the private sector.

Investment in local infrastructure organisations (and the wider local VCSE sector) ensure that the connections, relationships and resources are available when an emergency occurs. However, unlike investing in a snowplough which sits in a yard for 50 weeks of the year, investment in local infrastructure produces a return on that investment continually.

6. Resilience in an interconnected world – UK resilience is closely entwined with the wider global-political context. Challenges and opportunities are frequently experienced on a global scale.

The Covid-19 pandemic is one demonstration of how global scale issues have an effect on, and are responded to, at local level. Another example is the sudden shift in power in Afghanistan. The sudden withdrawal of US and other forces and the resumption of power by the Taliban has led to an increase in refugees seeking safety in the UK. It has also triggered fear and despair among Afghan people who had already made new lives in the UK, who are desperately upset at what has

happened, fearful for family and friends who remain in Afghanistan, and also facing a new future in which return to their original homes may never be a possibility. At the same time, the military and veterans' communities across the UK have also been affected. People who have served in Afghanistan have had difficult memories brought back to the surface, along with fear for the Afghan people with whom they worked closely: those people and their families are in grave danger of torture and death. Families and communities are also remembering those who died on active service in Afghanistan, and people left with life-changing mental and physical injuries from the conflict have also been affected, as have their families.

In the face of global crisis, people can feel helpless. But working and volunteering in their local communities to respond to some element of these crisis is empowering and puts people back in control, to a degree, of what is happening. At this level, the work of local infrastructure organisations creates places where people can act with purpose, in response to global situations. This links back to point 4 above, and the empowering of people and communities.

NAVCA members Action Together, Bolton CVS, Macc and Salford CVS worked quickly and collaboratively in response to the Afghanistan crisis.

As soon as people from Afghanistan were expected to start arriving in Greater Manchester, voluntary organisations, community groups, and faith organisations across the area began delivering vital help and support for people who had been caught up in the crisis and were fleeing persecution. The charities were particularly mindful of the impact on women and girls, and wanted to ensure there was safety and support for them in the city-region.

As a joint venture to support the local VCSE sector in Greater Manchester, Action Together, Bolton CVS, Macc and Salford CVS worked with the wider VCSE sector, identifying which organisations were providing direct support to refugees and those with no recourse to public funds. They worked collaboratively across the VCSE sector to build a collaborative, supportive response for people arriving in the region.

The response from communities across Greater Manchester was overwhelming with donations of clothes, phones and other essentials being organised for newly arrived refugees.

The local infrastructure organisations also used their many communication channels and shared details of how anyone in the city-region could help support those being evacuate from the crisis as well as refugees and asylum seekers from other countries.

NAVCA member VONNE has brought people and organisations across the north east of England together, with practical ways to respond to the climate emergency.

Over the last few months, VONNE and the other members of the VONNE Climate Action Alliance (VCAA) have been working hard to engage and discuss with others in the North East VCSE sector about how they can create and support a movement of organisations to take climate action by: increasing their knowledge and understanding of the topic; supporting them to make organisational changes; and supporting them to develop climate action activities in and through their work.

The collaboration involved exploring and articulating the problems, carrying out lots of user research with organisations, building a prototype website and carrying out testing and conversations on some tools that they could develop to support the sector. **Most organisations said they needed help to take their first steps to address the climate emergency, and that they want to learn more about the issue and how they could or should respond.**

The result so far is a web-based engagement and action tool, Going Green Together. The website enables and encourages organisations to find and take their first steps in a variety of topic areas such as office, travel, energy, food, engagement and waste. It also encourages organisations to share and inspire others with the actions they've taken.

For the VONNE Climate Action Alliance, the first iteration of the Going Green Together website is just the beginning. Beyond digital tools, the VCAA has developed plans and is currently seeking funding for a wider programme of support for VCSE organisations wishing to develop their climate action further. Due to launch in early 2022, this programme will include events, workshops and training sessions, the development of resources and toolkits, subsidised access to the Investors in the Environment framework and SmartCarbon carbon calculator, and seed funding for climate action projects.

How we see the National Resilience Strategy coming into play

NAVCA believes that there is a need for a more visible role for Local Resilience Forums. LRFs can be the visible face of emergency preparation, response and recovery across our communities. They are already in place and the experience during Covid-19 has tested their effectiveness.

We believe that the implementation of the National Resilience Strategy can be achieved through LRFs as the lead organisations, with some caveats, and these form the basis of our recommendations.

We believe LRFs need to be better connected to and engaged with their local infrastructure organisations and the wider VCSE sector in the area they cover. In a survey of NAVCA's members, we discovered a patchy picture of engagement. 17% of our members responded to the survey, covering all regions of England and 45% of LRFs. Only 23% of respondents said they were engaged with their LRF.

When asked about their LRF's engagement with the voluntary and community sector, we heard that in many cases engagement was perceived to be ad hoc and an afterthought, despite the guidance saying "The scope and effectiveness of co-operation between the different public, private and voluntary agencies or organisations is a critical success factor in the preparation and response to an emergency."⁶ In some cases, the VCSE sector was represented by major national charities, specifically the British Red Cross, and "4x4 organisations". However we found very little evidence of LRFs engaging proactively with their local VCSE or local infrastructure organisations.

NAVCA and our members recognise and value the role major national charities such as the British Red Cross play, as well as those focused on immediate emergency response. However, as we found in the wake of the Grenfell fire, local VCSE organisations and, specifically, local infrastructure organisations also have a crucial

⁶ Civil Contingencies Secretariat/Cabinet Office, [The role of Local Resilience Forums: A reference document](#), July 2013

role to play. Without drawing in and using that local expertise, the impact of support from national organisations can be lessened.

Conclusions and recommendations

NAVCA and our member organisations welcome this Call for Evidence. The new National Resilience Strategy creates a good opportunity to rebalance emergency preparedness and response and take full account of the value and impact that the local VCSE brings to our communities.

We have used our detailed knowledge of local infrastructure and the wider VCSE sector to identify how the VCSE's contribution to resilience and all stages of planning and response could be strengthened and formalised.

Recommendation 1: That each of the 42 Local Resilience Forums should work with the local infrastructure organisation(s) within the area covered and ensure at least one local infrastructure organisation is a full member of the LRF, involved in every stage of emergency response (mitigation, preparation, response and recovery). The local infrastructure organisation(s) will operate as a connector to the wider local VCSE sector, developing relationships between other members of the LRF (and the LRF as a whole) with local community groups, voluntary organisations and charities who can contribute at the various stages of emergency response, in a range of scenarios.

Recommendation 2: That funding is provided to enable the VCSE sector to take a full part in the LRF; and to work with the sector locally to foster resilient communities, develop the connections and relationships which are needed and be a coordinator within the VCSE sector and between the VCSE and other sectors. This has been calculated at £50k per FTE liaison post within one local infrastructure organisation in each of the 42 LRF, plus programme management. The total investment in resilience for this work amounts to £2.6m per annum.

Recommendation 3: That legislation should be enacted which formalises the involvement of local infrastructure organisations, as key connectors to the local VCSE sector within Local Resilience Forums. Other levers should also be developed to ensure meaningful engagement, including through the planning process, guidance and other support for LRFs.