Building resilient communities
From idea to sustainable action
The Risk and Regulation Advisory Council and the Talent and Enterprise Task Force have worked together over the last year on a project aimed at a shared goal of improving the resilience of communities.

We believe that we need resilient communities now, more than ever. We need communities that can cope with the risks we all face such as the recession, climate change and terrorism. This report briefly outlines what we have found in our joint work.

The Risk and Regulation Advisory Council want to ensure that risks are managed at the appropriate level. There is a danger that government is assuming too much responsibility for the management of risk. Resilient communities can help to avoid this, since there will be less need for the government to act if risks are already being well managed at the community or individual level.

The Talent and Enterprise Task Force want to unlock the latent talent and skill within communities, helping individuals to take action leading to more resilient communities.

The high point of our work was the workshop we held in December 2008. It brought a broad range of people together to understand how and why some people take action to help their communities, and how this can be encouraged and expanded. Through their knowledge and expertise, we were able to develop a greater depth of understanding of the issues, and gain insights into where effort was needed to improve the situation, leading us to the findings outlined here.

We were inspired by the many great examples of people helping their communities that we have seen – some of whom are described later on in this report. However, we believe there is a great deal of latent talent, knowledge, ability and willingness in people to improve their communities that is currently not being used. The Government has a key role in unlocking this talent.

To achieve our vision of resilient communities throughout the UK, we need:

- To consider everyone, in all organisations, as a potential community activist. We shouldn’t look for them only in certain sections of society;
- To focus on a community in a place and encourage all sectors of society in that place to work together. In particular, we should try and engage business more often, and encourage them to be involved with work in their local community – we have seen how this can achieve outstanding results;
- To identify and remove barriers to individuals taking action – this requires us to see the situation from the point of view of an individual, not from the government’s point of view; and
- To encourage, support and help individuals to take positive action in their community – by ensuring they have access to the right information at the right time.

We believe that acting on these ideas will be an important step in harnessing all the available talent we need to make communities resilient, and ultimately lead to a more appropriate level of risk being managed at the individual and community level.
We would like to thank Donald Macrae and Lynne Berry, members of the Risk and Regulation Advisory Council who led this work with Lorna Booth and Luke Wainscoat of the Risk and Regulation Team in the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. While the Risk and Regulation Advisory Council and the Talent and Enterprise Task Force were the catalysers and conveners of this debate, the real work, and insights came from the participants who were engaged in this debate. We thank them all for their commitment to building strong communities.

Rick Haythornthwaite
Chair of the Risk and Regulation Advisory Council

Lucy Parker
Chair of the Talent and Enterprise Task Force
Starting point

Individuals are using their talents every day to achieve extraordinary things in their communities. Our work has confirmed this belief. For example, see the two case studies on this and the following page. In addition, our view was that government at all levels has a big impact on the extent to which people take positive action in their communities, since it can help and encourage them, or it can block and deter them.

We started with the belief that in most cases public risks are better managed by those that are closest to the risk itself – often individuals, local organisations or local communities. People want to take action in their community, and when they do, it reduces the need for action from government.

CASE STUDY

Dr. Rachel Carr

Dr. Rachel Carr, founder and CEO of IntoUniversity, a charity that helps young people to attain their educational aspirations.

- It took the determined lobbying of funders, schools and parents to convince everyone of the value of talking to primary school children about university
- The network of local learning centres targets schools and assists young people to attain a university place or another chosen aspiration
- The educational charity continues to offer free after-school academic support, inspirational mentoring and personal support for children
- The belief that every child regardless of background, should have the option of a university education, led Rachel Carr to set up IntoUniversity
- Rachel became convinced that children should be encouraged to aspire to university as early as age 7
- Her involvement in a Community Project enabled her to launch an initial pilot scheme for IntoUniversity in 2002
- Since 2005 IntoUniversity North Kensington has seen 7593 students in IntoUniversity assemblies

“All hundreds of our kids now go to secondary school already knowing what university is and why they should aspire to go there”.

All community action starts with an individual with a spark
CASE STUDY

Mizan Abdulrouf

Mizan Abdulrouf, joint head of Pro Bono in the London Muslim Centre (LMC).

- Seeking to provide legal advice to the neediest people within his community, Mizan co-founded the Pro Bono Clinic in the LMC as a law student.
- The idea of a free legal Clinic operated by qualified solicitors and barristers crystallised when Mizan attended a talk by the Bar Pro Bono Unit in 2004.
- Acting upon a strong desire, negotiations for office space and funding towards rent and administrative costs were actively sought, and soon realized however, getting qualified lawyers on board proved difficult, finally two firms agreed to help. The service grew as more legal firms became involved.
- The Clinic is working with the pro bono industry to obtain a Trustee Board and achieve charitable status which will enable it to provide a better service for more people.
- Today the Clinic operates from two locations and offers free legal advice and assistance on a range of legal issues to anyone in need irrespective of background.
- Over 1000 people have now benefitted from the Clinic’s weekly free legal advice.

“Their achievements are very significant and they make a huge difference to the people who are in great need of legal assistance but cannot afford to pay for legal representation.”

Rt Hon the Baroness Scotland of Asthal QC,
National Pro Bono Week 2008
How we worked

We followed the innovative approach that the Risk and Regulation Advisory Council brought to all the topics it investigated. For more information on these techniques and the Council’s other reports, please see www.berr.gov.uk/deliverypartners/list/rrac/index.html

Our work began with a programme of research on community resilience and the development and implementation of a strategy to consult a wide range of people across society. We systematically discussed our work with all the people we considered relevant to this topic. An effort was made to include all voices:

- those who claim to have the answers, and those who don’t;
- those who are loudest, and those who are quiet; and
- those who are senior, and those who are not.

As a result of our consultation strategy, we engaged with many well known groups such as large charities and government departments, as well as some less well known ones, including a variety of small community groups, think tanks and research organisations. A list of the groups involved in this project is given in the annex.

We used ‘system dynamics’ diagrams to aid our understanding of the various influences on community resilience, since it is such a complex matter. These diagrams developed throughout our consultation, allowing us to understand how the many influences we were told about interact. An example of a system dynamics diagram is given in the box below.

**System dynamics diagram**

This diagram shows that if the Government takes greater responsibility for risks in the community, it may feel under pressure to take increasingly more responsibility, thereby eroding community resilience.

[Diagram showing system dynamics]
Abdur Rashid launched the Community Development Institute (CDI) to provide IT and business support training for ethnic minorities and disadvantaged communities.

- Abdur’s experience as an IT trainer highlighted a very real need for better IT and business support to ethnic minority groups and disadvantaged communities.
- Wanting to help, but having no experience in getting funding, Abdur had difficulty until a local businessman and fundraiser provided invaluable advice.
- A grant from the Lottery started the project with free IT training for over 16s.
- While successful, it was a huge struggle to keep the momentum going and raise funds.
- The main problem was funding criteria and applications to several agencies failed.

Persistence paid off. Now, thanks to a range of funding initiatives from the Lottery, Social Funds and community support from several councils, CDI can operate.

Today CDI provides free weekly IT, NVQ and business training for individuals, voluntary groups and businesses at two locations.

“The major barrier was the funding criteria. But you never give up. Understanding the need to support the community itself is what counts.”

CASE STUDY

Abdur Rashid
There are a large number of organisations that have an influence on community resilience including individuals, central government, business, regulators, donors and local authorities. These ‘risk actors’ and the interactions between them, make up the ‘risk landscape’ – a concept the Risk and Regulation Advisory Council has developed. The risk landscape evolved during our research and our discussions with others. This process helped us understand how the risk actors interact, and, as a result, affect community resilience. For an example of a risk landscape, see the box below and for more information on the risk landscape tool, see our report on the risk landscape at www.berr.gov.uk/delivery_partners/list/rrac/index.html

Risk landscape drawn up during the risk forum on building resilient communities

This diagram is a ‘risk landscape’ – a description of the various ‘risk actors’ or organisations that have an impact on people taking action in their communities. The blue people in each group represent the fact that individuals in any of these organisations can take action to make communities more resilient.
A range of key risk actors were identified and selected to take part in a **risk forum** in December 2008. The aim of the forum was to:

- Explore how people can use their talent, skill and dedication to make their communities stronger; and
- Identify the conditions that make it possible for individuals to take positive action in their communities.

The key risk actors were the individuals who had successfully taken action and helped their communities. A number of them took part, allowing us to hear first hand what helped them take action and what problems they were facing. The participants also included civil servants from relevant departments, insurers, large voluntary organisations, regulators, funders and research organisations.

The participants shared the desire for more resilient communities. But their roles and viewpoints were very different. It is this difference that allowed a fuller understanding of the challenge and possible solutions to be developed. This was done through creating a safe (non-judgmental) and stimulating environment at the risk forum that encouraged contribution from all participants.

“I thought it was a very good event and found it extremely enjoyable, engaging and educational”

Participant at forum on resilient communities

The forum was introduced with a message from Kevin Brennan MP, then Minister for the Third Sector, outlining the substantial challenge involved in building more resilient communities. Crucially, he asked, “How can we help those who want to help their communities?”
The forum was a creative, facilitated workshop with small group activities punctuated with sessions involving all the participants where the ideas of the small groups were tested with the wider group. The initial sessions of small group work were led by individuals who had been very successful in taking action in their communities, and were aimed at understanding the conditions under which successful community action takes place. After discussion in the wider group, this led to the second group exercise which developed ideas that would lead to greater community resilience – these were then discussed with the whole group.

Innovative facilitation techniques were used to encourage people to think in new ways and to share their ideas and views. This included using a graphic facilitator to draw some of the ideas in pictorial form. For an example of this, see the box below which summarises the last discussion on how to build more resilient communities.

There was a great deal of energy at the forum. It was clear that the participants passionately wanted to enable more community action to take place. The participants were able to learn from each other’s perspectives, and as a result their ideas could take into account the whole risk landscape rather than suit just one group.

"Excellently thought through and run event"

Participant at forum on resilient communities

After the forum, 15 participants from across sectors in society volunteered to take part in a Community of Practice to take forward the ideas from the forum. This Community of Practice includes people working in the government, community projects, large third sector bodies and others. It is this kind of mixture of skills and expertise that is needed to bring communities together. The Community of Practice decided to explore three ideas:

- Pick a handful of places that have become resilient communities and tell the story of how they became resilient through a piece of action research. Connect the resilient community with one that is being affected particularly badly by the economic downturn to help them become resilient too;
- Undertake research into how new technology can be used to help communities become more resilient; and
- Map the available support for individuals who want to take action and signpost people to sources of support.

"I left with a buzz"

Participant at forum on resilient communities
CASE STUDY

Bea Foster

Bea Foster, joint founder of the Creative Centre.

- Over the last two years, Bea, in partnership with six local voluntary community organisations, has worked tirelessly to set up the Burnley Creative Centre, an innovative project, located in the heart of one of Burnley’s most deprived diverse areas.

- The Centre offers a range of free services from the opportunity to develop creative skills (drama, music, film making), access informal IT learning skills, use an information and guidance service for Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities or visit a safe space for youngsters from other diverse communities.

- The Centre launched with just £25,000 of funding generated by all the individual voluntary groups.

- Since the Centre opened its doors at the beginning of the year, 300 14-24 year olds from the area have already taken advantage of the wide range of free services on offer at the Centre six days a week.

“It’s all about listening to people, building them up, giving them knowledge and skills – and getting them to look at what they need to do.”

“Money is spent improving communities in deprived areas but it doesn’t go directly from Central Government to small voluntary community groups... If it did, it would make a huge difference”
This section outlines the three themes that came from the participants at the forum.

1. A dramatic call for help
There already exists a substantial amount of help for people wanting to take action in their communities. Despite this, there was a call from the participants for more and better help on how someone should go about taking action in their community, and also how small scale action can be scaled up. For example, Mary Dhonau has successfully set up the National Flood Forum but called for help to understand how she could take her ideas forward – see the case study on page 13 for more information on Mary Dhonau.

The Government, local authorities, voluntary organisations and others provide useful information for people wanting to take action in their communities. But participants at the forum felt that this information was not flowing through to the relevant people at the relevant time. They wanted information to be more accessible and consistent and for there to be a one-stop shop for information about funding and support for community groups.

In addition to providing information, the participants thought there may be other ways for people to learn about how they can take action in their communities. For example, through individuals helping each other via social networking sites or a network of champions connecting the powerful to the powerless, and the connected to the unconnected.

It is important that the Government and others do not just provide more information, but consider the point of view of an individual wanting to take action. How can that individual access the information needed at the right time and through the networks that are most accessible to them?
Mary Dhonau, Chief Executive of the National Flood Forum.

- The Forum is an independently funded registered charity which provides a dedicated helpline and website to support flood victims.
- It works with other flood organisations through a series of community networks to get help to people who really need it.
- Mary and her neighbours petitioned in response to having ruined homes, and some having lost everything.
- Through Mary’s lobbying the media, local authorities and MPs started to listen to their concerns.

- Other groups soon joined and the National Flood Forum was formed with a focus on community support.
- Today Mary continues her work to be the “voice” for victims, helping communities to form Flood Action Groups, build their knowledge and share good practice.

“We’ve been successful because of the sheer volume of the floods...and the fact communities want to get involved and have a say in the way floods are managed”
2. Funding

Funding is a live and important issue for all organisations in the third sector, including those who attended the forum. However, many of the concerns were not about the level of funding, but about the structures and processes needed to acquire funding. The participants suggested that the structure of funding inhibits positive community action.

Too much energy is used by community activists trying to find funding, and in meeting the requirements associated with that funding – at present it feels like too much funding is short-term, bureaucratic and overly limited in what it can be spent on. The structure of funding appears to be developed to help the funders, rather than to take into account the reality of the individuals wanting to take action in their communities.

There is a need for a new understanding between funders and those who are funded. This should include the development of “grown-up” methods of funding that keep these constraints to a minimum. This could involve:

- New funding mechanisms – outside the normal grant funding – through organisations developing their own income streams or finding new funders, in business, for example;
- Longer term relationships between funders and fundees leading to greater trust in that relationship;
- Making funding sources more flexible, and open to funding innovation;
- Funders as delivery partners; and
- Learning from business about innovation cycles and planning – with new ideas being explored regularly, not just because another is failing.

Output from the risk forum

Response from forum participant when asked what could improve community resilience.

More Grown Up Approach to Funding e.g. funders as delivery partners where possible
Benita Refson, OBE, Founder and Chief Executive of The Place2Be.

- The Place2Be provides school-based counselling services to 47,000 children and their families across the UK.
- Benita’s experience as a student counsellor in London led her to believe that providing children with emotional support could help prevent poor mental health in adulthood.
- There were no quick answers, but she believed that kids could be helped if reached early and the most obvious place to provide this support would be in schools.
- The Place2Be began as a Family Service Unit pilot in a London school leading Benita to set up the independent charity in 1994.
- The Department for Education and Skills and the Department of Health assisted with initial funding, BT funded research and development of the model and KPMG developed the national structure.
- The Place2Be is funded through a partnership of schools, statutory agencies, corporate supporters and voluntary donations.
- Currently, the toughest challenge that the Place2Be faces is in the form of engaging with Local Authorities and dealing with the commissioning process.
- In each school, the charity places a team of counsellors – a paid School Project Manager and four Volunteer Counsellors. The School Project Manager becomes an integral part of the school assessing children and parents when appropriate to refer to one of our services.
- All work is monitored and evaluated using government-approved questionnaires.
- The Place2Be started a national programme in 1999 and now works in 146 primary schools.
3. Untapped potential for community action

There was a consensus at the forum that there was a substantial amount of untapped resource available to increase community resilience. Greater resource could come from:

i. **Considering everyone as a potential community activist.** There are many groups of individuals outside the traditional community sector who can – and do - act, and are motivated to make positive social changes, for example in local government, funding organisations and businesses. In supporting community action and seeking out new solutions, it would be valuable to recognise the different contributions that can be made by people from all sectors of society, rather than only the third sector. The idea that people in all sectors can help their communities is shown through the blue people taking action in the risk landscape on Page 8.

ii. **There is a great potential for synergies from cross-sectoral working.** Bringing together all the services and sectors that impact on a particular place and enabling them to work together has produced great results in a number of communities already. The social role of businesses and the engagement of educational practitioners in areas of community risk, is a valuable contribution to community resilience. This principle extends to collaborations with all the various delivery partners, funders, parts of government, and other risk actors. Such cross-sector partnerships broaden the range of skills and expertise, provide access to additional resources and can contribute to the sustainability of projects.

**Output from the risk forum**

Response from forum participant when asked what could improve community resilience.

*Part of the risk landscape*

Many more people in business could take positive social action in their communities.
Alec Cassie, Managing Director, BCW Engineering.

• Alec set up a recruitment scheme to employ and train local people who might otherwise struggle to find work.

• The idea was born out of a conversation in 2002 with Alec’s eldest son, who had worked in the community, training young people.

• The first person they helped was a 17 year old with learning difficulties and a horrendous home life. He was given a chance, became a very good worker and a trained machine operator.

• Because they wanted to do something for the community, they decided to continue to take on local people who might otherwise struggle to find work.

• Recruitment has been helped by organisations like Training 2000, Vedas and the Princes Trust who undertake to train underprivileged youngsters for the workforce.

• However, Alec notes that a significant aspect of the community scheme is being overlooked – keeping people in work.

• The programme has so far trained over 40 people who would otherwise have remained unemployed.

“BCW Engineering has high regard for the potential of young people and will assist them to develop into responsible adults and grow their abilities.”
Summary

We have seen the amazing power of communities. Bringing a community together around a shared goal can hugely improve the lives of those in that community. There is already a great deal of action taken by people in their communities, but we believe there is scope for much more.

All community action begins with an individual with an idea, a spark to do something new and help their community. To increase the amount of action taken in communities, the Government must consider the individual’s point of view and either provide support to them, or get out of their way if necessary.

The individual who has the spark can come from any sector of society. The government should ensure that the debate and policies on community resilience is framed in such a way as to include everyone as potential community activists. Being a community leader should be a mainstream activity, not something that takes place on the margins. This would help us to seize the potential from everyone in society to help create resilient communities.

The government is undertaking a great deal of very effective work to help communities become more resilient. But we have heard from the point of view of the community that it is very hard to find out about these initiatives, or use them once they are found. We believe that viewing the problem from the point of view of an individual taking action, and indeed working in partnership with those individuals, will lead to better solutions.
Annex
Groups involved with this work

ACEVO
BCW Engineering
BIS
Burnley One Town Project
Business in the Community
Capacity Builders
Charity Law Association
Charity Safety Group
Children England
Civil Contingencies Secretariat
CLG
Commission for the Compact
Community Development Institute
Creative Communities
DCSF
DEFRA
DEMOS
House of St Barnabas

Institute for Volunteering Research
IntoUniversity
INVOLVE
Local Government Association
London Funders
National Flood Forum
NAVCA
New Philanthropy Capital
OTS
Pro Bono in the LMC
Space Bus
Streets Alive
The Place2Be
The Prince's Charities
The Prince's Charities in Burnley
Volunteering England
WRVS
Zurich Insurance