

A new architecture for society

As the Coronavirus pandemic sweeps the world, *FIRE* Editor Andrew Lynch outlines the key elements required to transform our approach in his white paper, *Coronavirus: A Five-Step Reset for Fire and Emergency Leaders*

‘We must prepare for this random disorder, accept our society has changed irreparably, but do all we can to mitigate the impact’.

These are not the words of a minister advising the nation but, surprisingly, my own taken from the October 2001 issue of *FIRE*, in the immediate aftermath of 9/11.

In the current crisis – which is nothing short of a global calamity – focussing on short-term objectives is a live-saving priority. As we are becoming increasingly aware, it involves keeping the virus at bay so our NHS can cope; a strategy repeated across the world with equivalent health services, even as thousands die daily. But the medium and long-term consequences should be assessed simultaneously

by political and public service leaders.

I propose leaders work towards establishing a clearly defined approach for addressing the five steps outlined below within their organisations, while also adopting a cross-sector, cross-disciplinary mindset. This calls for a total reset to recondition our way of thinking towards protecting society.

In the immediate aftermath of the UK government’s stringent restrictions on movement, *FIRE*’s Security Correspondent Dr Sloggett told me that the outcome would likely be a “new architecture for society”. It is this phrase that frames the following observations and recommendations: a five-step reset to reorganise society to meet the demands of a post-Covid-19 world.

Five-Step Reset

1) Resetting the Ecosystem

The global impact of climate change is upon us, as the recent prelude of nationwide flooding only served to underline further for those not getting the message. As Dr Sloggett writes in the next issue of *FIRE*: 'Climate change, irrespective of the tedious arguments that are made by those who deny its reality by suggesting that this is another cycle which will pass, are simply living in a parallel universe'. It is clear that more needs to be done to address the increasingly devastating effect of environmental pollution – the growing 'unintended consequences' list has barely been explored, never mind debated on a national level.

Livestock farming, with the vast resources of rain forests expunged to feed livestock, is rapidly becoming the world's greatest single polluter. The unintended consequences of livestock requiring incredible levels of natural resources leads to dwindling water supplies, massive grain consumption and waste polluting streams, rivers and oceans. That's before we get to methane and the overuse of antibiotics to control diseases in factory farms and the consequential resistance humans are building to antibiotics.

As overpopulation and livestock farming force populations into wildland territories, our impact on biodiversity is becoming clear as wildlife and humans interact at unnaturally close quarters. The 'wet market' (the sale of live meat and fish) in Wuhan, China, where a variety of animals were displayed in unsanitary conditions, is the likely 'ground zero' for Coronavirus. Scientists at Wuhan University, of all places, have long predicted that a global pandemic was inevitable, less a matter of 'not if but when' rather 'not one but how many' – a frightening thought in dark times.

The 'tip of the iceberg' events – from devastating country-wide flooding and wildfires to global pandemics – has become the new normal. So, what happens when matters get even worse? When global temperature rises cause harvest failures, food shortages and famine?

Today's leaders must recognise a world in rapid decline due to our impact on the environment, acknowledge the devastation we have reaped and resolve to lead in every way possible to mitigate future impact. There can be no equivocation in recognising the inevitable to recommend the



most stringent response that we all need to take, such as bringing forward the deployment of electric cars. There should be no more excuses around 'unintended consequences' – the whole ecosystem is connected, and we must join the dots to understand the situation and remedy behaviour.

Leaders must educate themselves on every aspect of environmental impact, even the most unpalatable, to take the necessary steps to guide the public to make difficult choices. Quite simply, a step change is required. Could the pandemic be the first step to 'resetting' how society functions?

2) Resetting Fire and Rescue

The frontline response to the pandemic, headed by NHS workers and supported by emergency and public sector services has focused attention on the resourcefulness of our healthcare workers, while highlighting the fragility of the system as peak crisis rapidly approaches.

As a fundamental component of the public safety ecosystem, the Fire and Rescue Service has in one sense a unique capability – that of responding swiftly and effectively to fires and emergencies – acknowledged as on the whole being fit for purpose in HMI's State of Fire report. But other aspects of function and service delivery need to be re-addressed in the wake of the pandemic, not least the supportive role to other frontline service deliverers in times of crisis.

You may recall that the Knight Report in 2013 advocated closer working with the Ambulance

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Service as well as Police and but for Home Office priorities we could have travelled further in that direction. While several fire and rescue services have moved towards closer collaboration and support, the next step change is required in how public services operate together, both effectively, and importantly as budgets contract in the coming months and years, efficiently.

A realignment in how fire and rescue services operate, deliver services and collaborate should be considered now, as the attention centres on the NHS and away from fire and rescue. 'The day when the word 'Fire' is removed from the title of the 'Service' cannot be far away', our correspondent states and he might not be far wrong.

3) Resetting Dynamic Leaders

If realignment is required, then visionary leaders need to show the way. Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire and Rescue Services, Sir Tom Winsor, finds some aspect of FRS leadership inadequate, especially regarding diversity, as he states in the State of Fire report: 'All too often we have found senior management teams being an echo chamber for people who sound and think the same'.

In the February issue of *FIRE*, the Asian Fire Service Association's Jagtar Singh and Wayne McCollin espoused considering a range of leadership styles, from transactional to transformational, while stressing the importance of trust. 'The effective leader must be authentic, inclusive, value driven, honest, open and transparent' they state and go on to commend generative leadership above all else by saying: 'Generative leadership invites senior leaders to show vulnerability and empower key stakeholders to self-organise and to find the solution to complex issues'.

While transactional or autocratic leadership styles may be required at present in dealing with the crisis, a more dynamic approach will become increasingly crucial in future, incorporating a variety of styles for an entirely different society. The world is tilting on its axis and leaders should be able to shift their perspectives to incorporate a broader world view – an integral approach – and take their colleagues with them.

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The new architecture of society calls for a more dynamic, proactive style of leadership, unafraid to tell harsh truths to politicians and citizens alike to place protection on the front foot rather than the afterthought it had become in what was until recently a complacent society.

4) Resetting Resilient Communities

An ever-evolving cycle had begun the moment government announced restrictions on movement and while the worst excesses by the less considerate elements of society take hold of too much of the media airtime – adding unnecessarily to many people's angst – a growing movement by the silent majority is taking hold. That is one of family, group and community resilience. Given the restrictions of movement, communities are coming together virtually to protect the most vulnerable in supplying essentials, with an emerging NHS volunteer army.

Following the widespread flooding across the UK it was warming to discover a research wildfire drill project in the Austin Travis County region of

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Texas, with a population of 1.4 million residents which ranks fifth in US wildfire risk (see April issue of *FIRE*). The research findings from the drill by the University of Texas found that people who were more involved in the community association, and those who felt social pressures to prepare for fires, were more prepared. Researchers found that there seems to be more to preparedness than simply getting individuals to act. There was a collective sense that preparedness is important for this community.

This approach seemed relevant in the wake of recent widespread flooding and now seems even more apposite amid Coronavirus.

The government recently kicked off a scheme to recruit a volunteer army of 250,000 people to support the NHS, a precursor to a new sensibility and regard for community resilience. The idea is to assist vulnerable members of the community in providing essential support such as delivering medical provisions and transporting them to hospital. In sunnier times it recalls the 70,000 volunteers for the 2012 London Olympics – the Games Makers – who helped create a fun, communal atmosphere.

Although the circumstances are entirely different, key elements of pride in taking community action, helping others and creating a sense of 'being in it all together' should not be underestimated. How can this volunteer army approach be harnessed to face future challenges, next time before the horse has bolted?

5) Resetting Connected Communities

Staying connected has never been more crucial: from supporting vulnerable and isolated members of the community to the importance of clarity of messaging from public services and government, the power of effective communications has come under intense scrutiny.

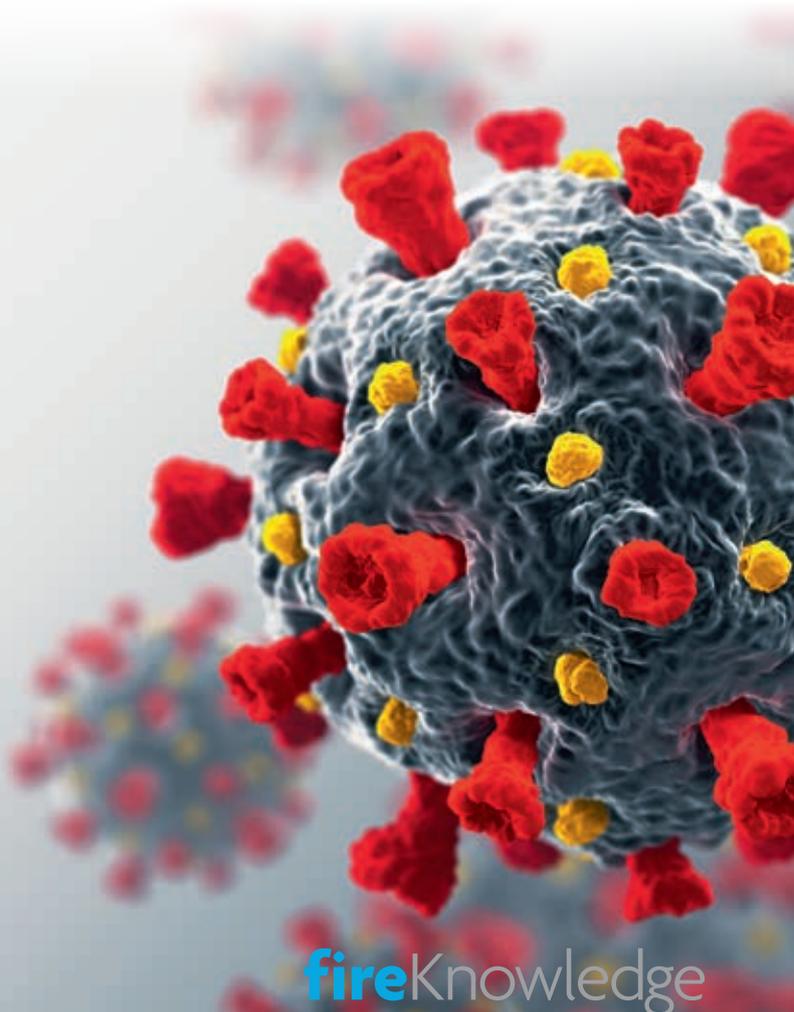
At the heart of this is how do we help each other? How do we safeguard the most vulnerable people in our communities? How do we ensure we follow guidelines? How do we act safely to protect ourselves and loved ones?

In the near future, the previous four resets should help us answer questions of how do we prepare for the next pandemic? What provisions do we put in place now, nationally,

regionally and locally to mitigate the next disaster, whether disease, terrorism, flood or famine? How do we stay connected to become a more resilient society?

If you think this is too soon to consider the next major incident amid the carnage of this one, reflect on how you felt when you first heard of the outbreak in Wuhan just a few months ago? Or Ebola, SARS? All of which struck on other continents but they might have been on other worlds.

If one positive comes from the Coronavirus let it be that we are better prepared to reduce the loss of life in the inevitable event of future catastrophes by being well informed, staying connected and proactive. It will require a step change, a complete reset of how we approach life, but that it is the only way of mitigating impact in this new architecture for society.



Beyond Coronavirus: Towards a new flexible Fire and Rescue Service

FIRE's Security Correspondent Dr Dave Sloggett looks at what the longer-term impacts of the global Covid-19 pandemic might be for the emergency services

The Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, may yet rue the day when he said at the daily press briefing from Number Ten Downing Street on March 19 that a turning point in the national effort against the Covid-19 global pandemic would be seen in around 12 weeks from now. His statement, using words that were ill-judged, may yet cause a number of people that are not yet fully engaged in the national effort to defeat the virus to adopt the age-old adage of 'keep clam and carry on' going out and socialising.

Those people, many of them of a younger generation, appear to think of themselves as being invincible. Through the crucible of social media, they develop a virtual immunity to the virus and believe, because the advice has been contradictory, that it is the elderly that are most at risk and that therefore they need not adopt the kind of measures that the rest of the population take seriously. This narrow interpretation of the situation, no doubt amplified through the echo chamber of social media, persuades many that they need not worry about catching the virus.

Sadly, in such a dynamic environment, where contemporary data from the US suggests that the degree to which young people have greater resilience to the ravages of the virus is not as clear-cut as previously believed, the picture often changes.

By the time that people realise that the emerging views of such pandemics changes regularly, it will be too late. For epidemiologists

there is a saying "once you have seen one pandemic... you have seen one pandemic". Science has yet to fully bottom out many of the nuanced elements of how pandemics work despite a history that dates back to the 14th century and the outbreak of Black Death.

Given the litany of global plagues and pandemics one might have thought that the government would have tempered its messages to the young by at least asking them to remember which part of society suffered the most in many historical plagues, such as Black Death and the Spanish Flu. It was younger people.

While the dynamics and inevitably rising death toll of the next ten weeks will be horrific

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fireKnowledge

there is another guarantee, if there are such things anymore, in such global pandemics. The virus will peak and subside. The Prime Minister must hope the 12-week timetable he put on this turning point gives him some wriggle room. Evidence emerging from China, South Korea and Italy provides conflicting viewpoints and may yet lead to that obviously politically motivated statement to be refined.

However, history is partially on his side. But to suggest, as he did almost in the same breath, that we can nationally defeat Covid-19 and send it packing was a step too far. One can only imagine how the hearts of two of our most eminent scientists must have sank when the Prime Minister talked up the end of the pandemic. It must be increasingly clear to them that politics and pandemics do not easily mix in the social media driven world of the 21st century (see pg 16 'A lack of collective imagination').

From the outbreak of the virus the government has, rightly, been guided by the science. The initial recourse to lessons that emerged from the most recent global outbreaks of, for example, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in 2002 – which peaked in May 2003 – was based on sound advice. When a new virus strikes science has to look for previous outbreaks that might provide clues.

But a lot has changed in the world since 2003. Its impact, with just over 8,000 people infected and a death toll of just over 800, has been surpassed quickly by the current Covid-19 pandemic. Once data became available from China, South Korea and Italy (specifically) the SARS models were refined and a much more alarming picture emerged. Scientists from Imperial College told the Prime Minister and the Cabinet that if nothing were done the death toll in the UK could reach 0.5 million people. To their credit, within hours a new approach had been adopted. It was draconian in its outlook.

Covid-19 Legacy

Whatever the timing might be on the point at which the virus turns downwards, it is interesting to look at what its legacy might leave. The first and most obvious point is that by implementing the measures the government has forsworn the

approach that was designed to build 'herd immunity'. That means that the most clear outcome of the current pandemic is that like so-called "ordinary flu" we may have to learn to live with Covid-19 for some time to come until a vaccine is available and it is able to be rolled out. Of itself that does not solve the issue. A return to normal, whatever that means, is unlikely. The societal scars of Covid-19 are not about to be blown away by a magic wand waved by the Prime Minister.

While many had been welcoming the move away from the hard years of austerity, most notably in the recent budget delivered by the Chancellor pumping billions more into the economy, there is a distinct possibility that the world post Covid-19 is going to be harder.

The inflation lessons from Zimbabwe need to be heeded. The government, and by implication we as a society, cannot print money as a way out of this crisis. A return to some form of 'selective' austerity is inevitable. This will require society to make distinct choices over priorities with the capability for the NHS to surge to handle another outbreak of Covid-19 or perhaps much worse, a new and more deadly mutation of the virus being top of the list.

In this situation the government is almost bound to look around to reign in some of its spending. The commitment to level-up the UK also appears to be a sacrosanct political viewpoint. Rightly, for too long some parts of the UK have lagged and suffered specifically hard from the measures implemented during the height of austerity. They do need investment. But arguably more quickly than can be delivered by national investments like HS-2.

“What can we do in the immediate aftermath to maintain resilience?”

With money being tight it is almost inevitable that every part of public spending will come under careful scrutiny. For the leadership of the Fire and Rescue Service across the UK this poses a huge challenge. In the short term it would be very sensible for them to show just how well the Fire and Rescue Service can form a part of creating a collective national resilience to such a pandemic.

Giving more training to Fire and Rescue Service staff to enable them to provide support to the Ambulance Service and where it is possible into the wider NHS must be on the table. The leadership of the Fire and Rescue Service would do well to create some additional flexibility in their response. The day when the word 'Fire' is removed from the title of the 'Service' cannot be far away.

A Flexible Service

Already many countries have recognised the need for an emergency service component that focuses its efforts, flexibility, towards all of the other types of emergencies that may occur in a globalised society. From flooding, to forest fires, house and industrial fires and chemical spills it seems inevitable that a national emergency service needs to be created that can flexibly allocate resources to the most obvious point of need. As the military shows its flexibility so must the Fire and Rescue Service.

It is also easy to envisage how the current crisis will also finally provide the political backdrop for a fundamental change to the structure of UK policing. What happened in Scotland in the amalgamation of the Police and the Fire and Rescue Service into an integrated service is still

eyed with some envy in parts of the government. Post the initial phase of Covid-19 such a political agenda is almost bound to be back on ministers' radar horizon. When the Prime Minister speaks of a national effort to achieve progress, that is a cue for all sorts of potential changes to be debated in the future.

Of all the things that must happen when the turning point is reached, the most fundamental is that the lessons to be learnt from the national readiness for the emergency have to be looked at in detail. The degree of contingency planning has to be analysed and lessons drawn from obvious weaknesses. Why was it that ministers appeared to be slow to act? When did the last COBR exercise looking at a global pandemic and its impact on the UK in an increasingly globalised world occur? What templates for decision making were drawn from that exercise? How have they been archived? What is going to be stored from this event? And finally, what can we do in the immediate aftermath to maintain resilience?

Of all thinking about the future and life beyond this current global pandemic there is a surety that this event is a segway to another. Until there are agreed global food standards to which every country, despite its taste for what it regards as delicacies, the simple fact is that another – possibly much worse – pandemic is on the horizon. While no-one in the middle of the current crisis wants to hear this – the sooner we prepare for the next event the better equipped we will be to deal with it. That is the simple lesson that emerges from the current crisis, but the most important question is, will we learn from this or all return to the day job and hope nothing worse occurs?

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