



RESILIENCE FIRST

SURVIVE & THRIVE

**Adapting to change:**  
advancing business community resilience

## Introduction

Resilience First is an initiative that is designed to strengthen business resilience so that local urban communities (micro-cities) become more agile and adaptable to overcome future challenges and change.

The idea of bouncing back from disruption or adversity and returning to business as usual (*status quo ante*) is no longer sufficient in modern times with new risks. A more pertinent question is how do business communities bounce forward to a new status that confers better competitiveness and sustainability for the long term, and respond positively to recurring and unexpected challenges.

This monograph is a manifesto for Resilience First.



## What is business community resilience?

Resilience is defined as the ability to anticipate (before), absorb (during) and adapt (after) to the sort of change that can destabilise individuals, organisations or communities. As this initiative is not primarily focused on crisis management, the emphasis here is on the before and after.

Whether viewed in a spatial, situational or specialism context, resilience has commonly been viewed as a capacity to respond to extraneous short-term shocks e.g. floods or long-term stresses e.g. droughts. As a result, resilience is largely associated with a level of protection or defence. Overcoming the challenges is a measure of one's survival capacity and the mitigating measures deployed to reduce the worst effects. This is crucial for all businesses of any size.

In addition to the disruptive shocks and stresses, local urban communities face other pressures. As communities are a varied collection of individuals and organisations then there is the important question of local risks and needs e.g. tackling gang-related crime. Local may also be a translation of national challenges e.g. recession, automation. Such pressures are often

incremental in nature but can dominate as they affect everyday life. Overcoming them can be a measure of the social capital of the locale i.e. identity, trust, neighbourliness, education, etc. Local resilience here can be both positive and transformational.

Business community resilience should address both sides of the resilience coin, namely the major disruptive events as well as the severe local challenges. One side of the coin can affect the other and *vice versa*. For instance, research around the Japanese earthquake of March 2011 showed that communities with deeper reservoirs of social capital had higher survival rates and faster recovery rates. Understanding the 'soft' side of resilience i.e. the personable and adaptable features, can therefore be as important as understanding the 'hard' side of resilience i.e. the directional and attributable features.

At all levels of engagement, resilience reflects a response to change. In a turbulent and dynamic world, there appears to be a greater realization to accept and willingness to grasp change by taking calculated new risks. This gives new impetus to resilience.

## What is Resilience First?

Resilience First is designed to make the difference between success and failure for an urban business community facing major challenges or severe disruption. It aims to create an exchange of influential leaders who can improve urban resilience in local areas through innovation, integration, collaboration and leadership. The intention is to bring together people in mixed properties into a holistic space so that there can be mutual support and benefit.

In order to advance business community resilience, however, it is important to address firstly the question: 'What does good look like?' The answer begins with a gap analysis.

The following gaps in the resilience arena have been identified:

- **Current focus on immediate shocks over longer term, chronic stresses.** *This requires a shift in focus to vulnerabilities and consequences and away from risks and threats, and a greater awareness of the social imperatives that challenge people's daily lives.*
- **Emphasis on strategic plans and protocols (top down) over local community measures and people's motivations (bottom up).** *This requires an attitudinal and behavioural change, with business communities being prepared to self-help where possible, and being empowered when necessary.*
- **Emphasis on responses to single events over preparedness for and regeneration from repeated disruptions.** *This requires a shift to adaptability and agility to allow communities to absorb repeated knocks and still bounce forward together, as well as better horizon scanning to anticipate future challenges.*
- **Lack of a holistic framework to coalesce initiatives and facilitate contributions (as witnessed at Grenfell).** *This requires better collaboration between and within the public and private sectors, and mechanisms to improve resilience for all.*
- **Advice needs to be communicated to the lowest possible denominator.** *This requires a readily accessible, mobile platform (app) that exchanges key information and shares best practices ahead of business disruptions. This is seen as a key enabler to develop a capacity for communities to make informed decisions and take appropriate actions when disruptive events occur.*

The solution to these requirements is multifaceted. Good should reflect the co-ordinated effort by organisations in a location to adapt to a changing environment. These entities can consist of offices, retail units, hotels, museums, residential blocks, etc. They can also be from both the public and private sectors. Each has a geographical space to defend as well as an emotional attachment to nurture. The resilience of the community will depend on the resilience of citizens, companies, voluntary bodies and local authorities working towards a common goal.

The template for that common goal should be transferrable to any urban area where there is a common interest in survivability and sustainability in the face of multiple challenges. A community can both facilitate and frustrate resilience. It can also be an agent for change in and of itself. Bearing in mind communities can be fluid with commuters and tourists, dispersed or clustered with interest groups, and have wide income disparities, there is no one perfect template but there are generic traits which should help other micro-city locations. Resilience First is not a city-wide strategic prescription: it is more an operating model designed to bring about local change.

The initiative aims to be a collegiate and influential private-sector entity or special-interest group to represent and nurture business community resilience. Business, especially in larger institutions, is increasingly aware of the significance and benefits of resilience not only to their premises but also to the people within and around their sites; many employees and visitors come from well beyond London. Hence, there is a step-change moment to bring together more effectively the public and private sectors in order to deliver better community resilience for business as a whole. From past experiences, the private sector is better positioned to lead and deliver a sustainable outcome.

## Success Criteria

If the private sector is to be actively and collegiately engaged in improving resilience across the board then there should be a commercial imperative in working with the public sector. Collaboration should demonstrate that it is good for business (i.e. protects or improves the bottom line), helps secure brand and reputation when crises occur, enhances corporate social responsibility, and shows customers and staff alike that the organisation is a responsible and caring employer. Resilience can positively impact on a community's duty of care while improving competitive advantage i.e. it is a business enabler.

For Resilience First, this means that good looks like:

- **A programme that promotes community resilience to mixed public- and private-sector organisations where there is common interest and/or shared space.** *This provides the interaction between the social and physical infrastructures, as well as the connections between real and virtual networks.*
- **A programme that shares best practice to help prepare mixed communities for shocks and especially stresses.** *This provides thought leadership at senior level on how to identify and*

- *support communities in coming together for adaptation and sustainability before, during and after major disruptive events.*
- **A programme that focuses on instigating behavioural change in communities.** *This provides the necessary advice, tools and ability before an incident so that people can draw upon internal resources to help themselves rather than expect external authorities to intervene and resolve.*
- **A programme that provides a communication tool (app) that allows information to be shared and enables the level of resilience in any organisation to be benchmarked so that baselines can be set and progress measured.** *This provides data analytics for wider area assessment and a mapping system for capturing social capital.*

The overall focus of Resilience First is on addressing both the soft and hard skills of resilience in the face of both immediate and gradual changes to the operation of local business communities. The project covers matters of leadership, empowerment, education, training and engagement. Resilience is not envisaged as a business function, rather a transformative state to be achieved which requires action across the whole community.



# Outputs

Resilience First will initially be based around deliverables from four workstreams that will be run as collaborative projects and interventions:

- **Advocacy:** This means lobbying for changes in key policies or standards (i.e. the hard side). It will also include advancing thought leadership and education (i.e. the soft side) around major resilience issues. Examples could include lobbying for flooding insurance for businesses (not currently covered by Flood Re) or advocating better information exchange in the government's drive for better fusion.
- **Alliances:** Lobbying will be helped through partnerships with other organisations that share the same objectives. Such unions can only add weight to the cause and give voice to power. Organisations like the FSB and BCC have similar concerns, for instance, over cyber protection and cyber insurance for small businesses or housing resilience for blue-light workers.
- **Communication:** To be able to communicate important messages – whether they are important notices or good practices – to diverse populations in

- a business community is a challenge which this project will address. The fire at Grenfell Tower demonstrated this graphically as well as the inability to co-ordinate the responses from the public and private sectors. The key is to have the channels of communication open in advance and the co-ordination trialled and tested before any event.
- **Tools & Services.** If effective communication is to happen for the deliberate purpose of coalescing and transferring the soft and hard skills of resilience then the means of transmission and the medium for the message both need to exist. A mobile platform, the Application for Resilient Communities (ARC), has been built to facilitate messaging but further advances in tools and services need to be made widely available.

The overall imperative will be to embed resilient thinking into corporate strategy and culture. To do this, it will also be necessary to develop an understanding of what makes a community more or less resilient; this is a benchmarking question. These are all areas ripe for examination and practical interventions.

## Way Forward

Resilience First, led by business, can provide a valuable role in being the link between work carried out within the private sector and with the wider public sector on resilience. It can act as a vehicle for the transference of good practice that goes beyond the remits of the Category 1 and 2 responders in the Civil Contingencies Act (2004) and decreed Local Resilience Fora. This approach would also be consistent with the forthcoming standard on City Resilience (BS 67000).

Resilience First can support the work of the new Deputy Mayor (Fire and Resilience) and the Chief Resilience Officer for London by working on a bottom-up, community-based solution that complements a top-down strategy. It can be the focal point for a business-focused, special interest group that would strengthen trust between all parties. This would hopefully facilitate the sharing of information and act as a hub for ensuring the most effective use of combined resources. Accordingly, it would protect London's reputation and competitiveness as a global, mercantile city in a post-Brexit world.



RESILIENCE FIRST

SURVIVE & THRIVE

---

This initiative is a self-standing, not-for-profit entity, associated with London First.

**Robert Hall**  
**Executive Director, Resilience First**

28 March 2018