

‘This is not a drill: scoping police and partnership planning for the consequences of climate emergency’

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Abstract

Whether the UK government achieves net zero within its defined timescale or not, the global consequences of climate emergency endure. The relationship between crime, harm and climate change is reciprocal, factors include some individual, but primarily corporate and state activity related to emissions and activities which damage the environment and local communities. This paper reports on a small-scale qualitative scoping study on the state of preparedness of the police, and public sector partners and agencies, for the consequences of the climate emergency. A qualitative research design was used, and thematic analysis applied to the data. Semi-structured interviews engaged 13 participants drawn from a cohort representing strategic, tactical, and operational levels of risk assessment, planning, management, and response within the police, local authorities, utility providers, government contractors, Environment Agency, Ministry of Defence and National Preparedness Commission. Four broad themes are identified: 1) climate change impacts; 2) why should the police care; 3) prioritisation and preparation, and 4) enabling and impeding factors. The findings highlight: planning cycles are short-term (typically 2-4 years); focus is on that mandated by law, and the 'usual' threats identified in the National Risk Register (floods and extreme weather events); impacts of cascading threats are less well understood; a lack of leadership from central government; minimal consideration of the ethical dimensions of policing in the context of climate emergency, the requirement for greater 'thought' leadership in planning, preparing and responding.

Key words – climate emergency, resilience, planning, risk assessment.

Context

On the 1st of May 2019, the UK parliament declared a 'climate emergency' in response to growing evidence of the dangers from climate change facing countries and communities across the globe.

Potential consequences pose not only threats to life and human prosperity but can overwhelm the capacity and capability of public authorities and their partners to plan and respond accordingly. ***Policing and the criminal justice sector are not exempt.***

Cont.

Whether the UK government achieves net zero or not, the global **consequences** of climate emergency endure.

The relationship between **crime, harm and climate change** is reciprocal, factors include some individual, but primarily corporate and state activity related to emissions and activities which damage the environment and local communities.

The **research problem** – to what extent the police and their partners are planning and preparing for **the full range** of these consequences, and the **framework** within which this occurs.

The answers to questions like these aren't widely known – until now!

The study – Phase 1

A small-scale scoping study aimed at **assessing the state of preparedness** of the police and public sector partners and agencies, for the consequences of the climate emergency.
To establish if and to what extent there is a problem here.

Method

WHAT - A qualitative study employing a snowball sampling method, following 'cold' calls through publicly available lists of **LRF** member bodies and existing contacts within the police service.

WHO - thirteen participants drawn from a self-selected cohort representing strategic, tactical, and operational levels of **risk assessment, resilience planning, management and delivery**:

- Police
- Local authorities
- Utility providers
- Specialist government contractor
- Environment Agency
- Ministry of Defence
- National Preparedness Commission (reviewers of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004)

Each participant took part in an online (via MS Teams), semi-structured interview which was recorded and transcribed, and data subjected to thematic analysis.

The themes

- Climate change impacts
- Prioritisation and preparation
- Why should the police care?
- Enabling and impeding factors

Headline findings – Climate change impacts

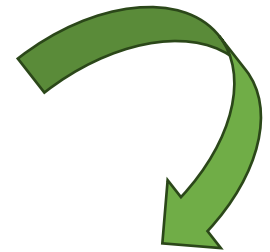
The **consequences** transcend those immediately felt in the UK, such as extreme weather events – in time to come, these are likely to be ‘violent expressions of **consequences of consequences**’ (Participant 4), originating from elsewhere in the world and the synergy of **cascading threats**.

Protest and public order feature significantly. However, the challenge arises where rather than being limited to the ‘usual suspects’, it becomes more socially widespread and supported by ‘generally law-abiding citizens’ (Participant 9), a recognition that ‘if communities are not happy because their environment is unpleasant, it's going to be the police dealing with the issues’ (Participant 7), and ‘people are going to get desperate [...] because they feel that they aren't getting heard’

Public health crises; fuel, famine, water and food security; increasingly vulnerable populations, and climate ‘refugees’ fleeing environmental and **societal decay** in search of safety and stability, all with impacts on ‘community cohesion and community tensions’ (Participant 9)

Not one offs – acute v chronic ‘solid state of affairs’

BUT Many of these feature in the NSRA and NRR – yet received limited attention at local level planning. **Dealing with climate change** issues were seen as ‘the nice-to-do and the should-do, pie in the sky [...] anything that's not statutory is do.’ (Participant 5)



Headline findings – Prioritisation and Preparation

“It's a whole **way of thinking**, that culturally the police just don't get. [...] I think it's gonna require a skill set that we don't have, and culturally, will be quite painful.” (Participant 8)

The main complaint highlights **disingenuity**, such as ‘being the leading partner globally and saying “we must all do this”, like at COP 26 (7). And yet, at home not doing it. So, where you've got other countries with really good Disaster Risk Reduction strategies at national level, increasing at their local level. Here we just haven't really got that.’ (Participant 3)

Planning was called into question and appears **ineffective** to address **the compound effects of cascading threats**. This is because it operates on a two-year cycle at a national level. While longer-term forecasts and planning do exist, and this is acknowledged; the reality is that most local areas and their partners operate with **two to four-year planning cycles**

Some **threats** had yet to penetrate the **planning process**, for example, ‘it's not on the strategic risk register. For sure, climate change is something that is picked up in our horizon scanning work [...] So, we're definitely talking about it.’ (Participant 1)

Moving into this space needed ‘somebody to grip it’ and recognising that ‘people don't see it as **a burning platform** [...] and they should. They should definitely be responding and doing things right **now**.’ (Participant 1).

Headline findings - Why should the police care?

Lack of awareness

There was minimal awareness and understanding of national and global trend analysis, understandable in the non-police sector, but surprising within the police service. This may have consequences in the way that challenges are conceptualised, and planned for.

Ethical dilemmas

Whether a position that practitioners 'shouldn't be arbiters of what's right and wrong' and 'the ethical test, isn't for us [the police]' (Participant 8) remains feasible should harmful impacts reach a critical level, remains to be seen.

Policing impacts – impacting the Police as citizens themselves

Police legitimacy and accountability. For example, issues around future performance indicators of how 'green' the police are, and the impact such measures would have on the organisation's reputation and ability to attract staff (Participant 9)

the police service is ill prepared in this area because 'policing is a **200-year-old model dragging itself through the 21st century** [...] and not fit for the future' (Participant 8)

As Category 1 responders, the police play a pivotal role in the planning for and response to civil emergencies, in partnership with other legally categorised organisations and agencies. Yet, such **planning is limited to those listed by the NSRA/LRF priorities which can be siloed**
Don't see CC as a police issue...

Headline findings - Enabling and Impeding factors

There is an issue with government leadership on matters of risk assessment, direction, planning priorities, and resourcing at a local level. **Central government lacks thought leadership**

‘that strategic level **longer-term thinking**, it’s not there. It’s not anywhere frankly. Certainly not there in government.’
(Participant 4)

‘**central government** need to drive it because it will creep up upon the police and it will happen and we won't be ready for it’
(Participant 10)

‘What is **missing** is certainly the **appetite** to go deeper and go back into a process and say right, we can treat symptoms, but how about let's treat the root causes...(Participant 12)

‘there is merit in bringing in **wider partners** such as ‘academia, you bring in some global players, people with different viewpoints.’ (Participant 4).

I'm not seeing a link between the Council's climate change strategy and fire and rescues and police, and the NHS. All of those, it's all very siloed (Participant 5) –
the framework isn't fit for purpose

Everywhere that's publicly funded at the moment is saying, ‘Is it a statutory responsibility?’
And if the answer is no, it goes on page 2, doesn't it?
(Participant 6)

**Funding – resourcing – leadership – desire –
Joined up thinking and working**

Next steps – Phase 2

- Expand the qualitative interviewing with a larger cohort – with refined questions around the specific themes identified in the scoping study
- Engage with police and interested parties through a Twitter-based discussion forum – ‘#WeCops’
- Documentary analysis – Community Risk Registers
- Publication of phase 1 work

Concluding remarks

Planning cycles in context of LRFs – extending beyond 2-4 yearly

‘Central’ leadership from govt.

Thought leadership across policing/partners

Awareness of the FOE

Ethical considerations of activities/non-action

Developing climate change consequences as a ‘community safety’ issue
– similar to other crime and disorder/public safety ones.

Glossary

COP - Conference of the Parties, and the summit was attended by the countries that signed the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) – a treaty that came into force in 1994. The 26th COP summit was hosted in partnership between the UK and Italy.

CRR – Community Risk Register is a localised summary for public consumption of key risks derived from the NRR.

LRF – Local Resilience Forums are multi-agency partnerships made up of representatives from local public services, including the emergency services, local authorities, the NHS, the Environment Agency and others. These agencies are known as Category 1 Responders, as defined by the Civil Contingencies Act. LRFs are supported by organisations, known as Category 2 responders, such as the Highways Agency and public utility companies. They have a responsibility to co-operate with Category 1 organisations and to share relevant information. LRFs also work with other partners in the military and voluntary sectors.

NRR – National Risk Register is the public-facing version of the national security risk assessment (NSRA), the government’s classified assessment of the national security risks facing the UK or its overseas interests. It provides information to the public on the most significant risks that the government has assessed could occur and which could have a wide range of impacts on the country, such as terrorist attacks or natural events like flooding. It also details how the government is identifying, assessing, preparing for and dealing with such potential emergencies.

NSRA - National Security Risk Assessment assesses serious acute national risks that have a reasonable likelihood of occurring within 2 years. Risks are assessed, amalgamated into broad categories (for example “emerging infectious disease” is a single risk) and represented by “reasonable worst-case scenarios” (RWCS). The process is led by the Civil Contingencies Secretariat (CCS) and each risk is owned by a government department. The NSRA is used to inform national resilience planning. It is *not* a public-facing document, a public version of the NSRA is known as the National Risk Register (NRR).

SRR – Strategic Risk Register (SRR) develops and records a risk-based approach to the corporate and service plans of an agency or organisation. The risks included in the SRR are those which have been identified as likely to impact on the delivery of strategic objectives.

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Thank You

Any Questions?

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