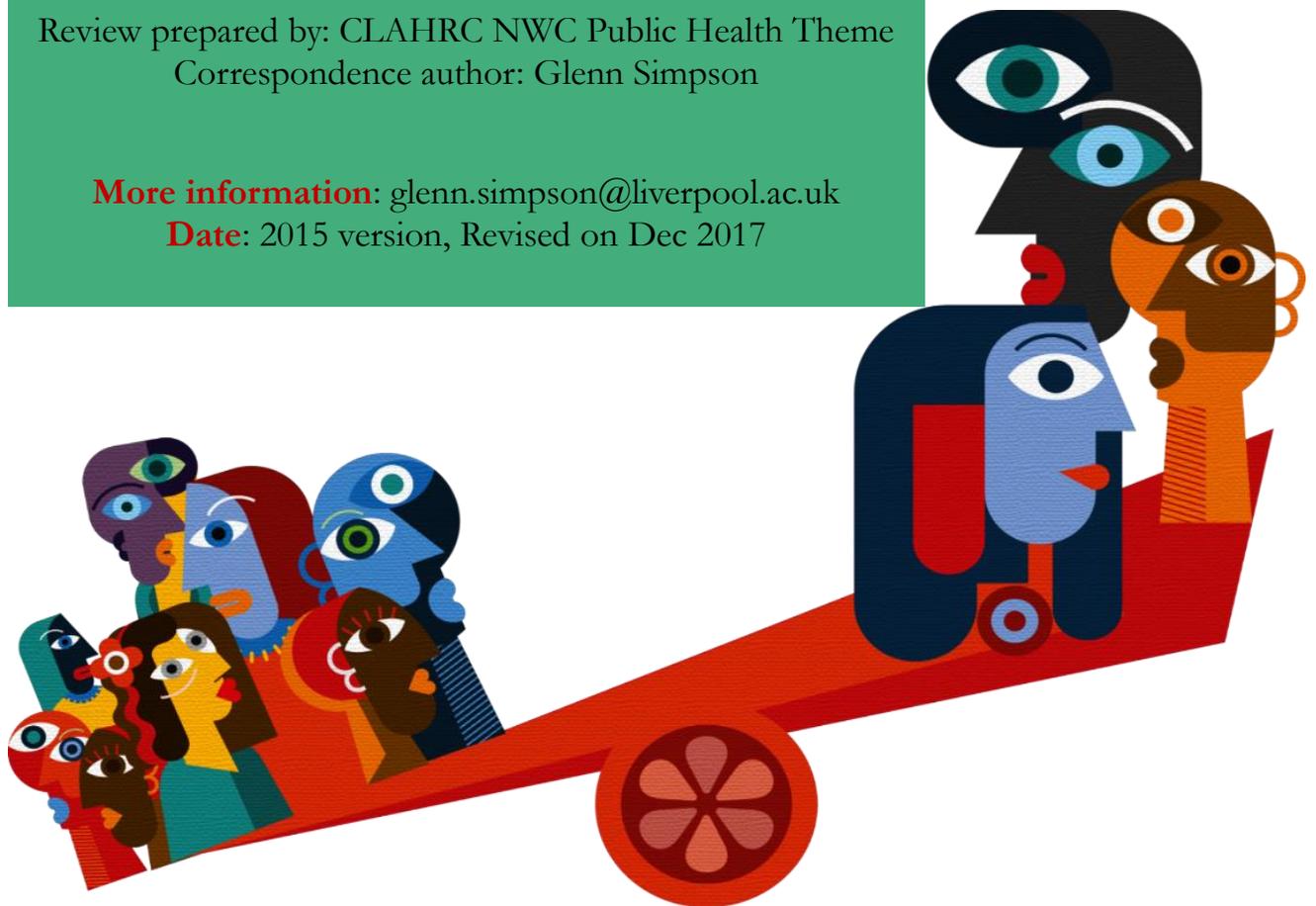


Reviewing the evidence: Local government and resilience in an era of austerity

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Introduction

This very rapid review of the academic and policy literature was conducted during 2015 (and modestly amended in 2017) to gain a more informed understanding about how the term resilience has been conceptualised in the academic literature, especially in relation to its utilisation in both the practice of governance and public policy making. The review was primarily targeted at local government policy and practice specifically in relation to identifying practical ways in which the resilience concept has been used by local authorities to inform and implement local policy initiatives. Information about this issue was gathered from searches of the local government policy and grey literatures.

The review considered how this increasingly ubiquitous concept of resilience has informed local government policy-makers' attempts to find novel and innovative approaches to understand, address and mitigate the impacts of public expenditure austerity on local communities, whilst concurrently maintaining a commitment to reducing health inequalities in local populations. In this regard, the review provides insights into the potential contribution 'resilience-informed' policy approaches can make to tackling deep-rooted health and social inequalities in local communities across the United Kingdom. A number of practical examples of local resilience initiatives in action are also presented in this review.

What is resilience?

The term resilience is used in a multitude of different contexts, across a range of disciplines. Most commonly in a governmental context, resilience is used in the emergency and disaster planning literature to refer to a community's preparedness for, and capacity to withstand and respond to, emergencies or unforeseen natural or man-made events such as major flooding, fire or major pollution incidents. In this context, the term 'community resilience' is sometimes used, primarily to denote a specific focus on communities of place or groups of individuals. The UK government defines community resilience as: 'about communities and individuals harnessing local resources and expertise to help themselves in an emergency, in a way that complements the response of the emergency services.'¹

Coming from a community cohesion perspective, resilience is conceived as a process to counter extremism in certain communities deemed at risk. The Improvement and Development Agency (I&DeA) and the Local Government Association, in association with the Department for Communities and Local Government, have developed a range of resources to advise local authorities on how best to support communities to design projects to tackle various forms of extremism.² In addition, in response to major mass social disorder (e.g. the London riots and disturbances in other English cities in 2010) or inter-ethnic tensions (e.g. the riots Burnley, Oldham and Bradford in 2001), resilience has been seen as a preventative approach, aimed at strengthening communities so that they are less

¹ Cabinet Office website, 2010. *What is Community Resilience?* Available at: <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100810081923/cabinetoffice.gov.uk/ukresilience/communityresilience.aspx>. Accessed on: 05/03/14.

² Cohesive and Resilient Communities website. Available at: <http://collection.europarchive.org/tna/20090106142604/http://www.beacons.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageld=9410256>. Accessed on: 06/03/14.

susceptible to tension or disorder breaking out in the future.³ Much of this work has focused on integration, tackling inequalities, and strengthening relationships and facilitating dialogue between communities from different ethnic, cultural or religious backgrounds.

As Harrow (2009: 1)⁴ points out, the concept of resilience:

... is now embedded firmly in public policy, public management and third sector discourse. It appears to be overtaking its close cousin, “sustainability”, as a more immediate goal in recessionary times.

Increasingly in UK academic and policy circles, the concept of resilience has been employed in the context of the recent economic recession and associated severe public expenditure cuts, particularly in relation to the impact on low-income communities of cuts in social and welfare spending. In this context, building resilience in communities has been conceptualised as a buffer or shield against the full force of these external pressures, as well as a means of support to enable groups, households/families or individuals to better cope with this challenging and changing new environment.⁵

This approach to resilience is also driven by social justice and inequalities considerations, with the third-sector and to a lesser extent local government arguing that socio-economic inequalities (not only between different communities but within them) are widening and being accelerated by the recent economic downturn. It is argued that vulnerable and ‘less resilient’ communities, particularly those with a history of long-term disadvantage, are often disproportionately affected by the impacts of this economic adversity. In response, there is a need for targeted interventions directed at those communities most affected, to enable them to develop greater resilience and self-reliance. In this way, these communities will be able to better withstand and rebound from the on-going and potential future challenges posed by austerity economics. As Hearn Morrow (2008: 3)⁶ points out, underlying this perspective is a social justice narrative that focuses on ‘the distribution of benefits and burdens’ within society, which:

... argues that we [policy-makers] need to think about sustaining a good quality of life across populations, not just for the future but also in the present ... It goes beyond environmental issues,

³ Cooper, K. (2012) *UK riots: resilience, and tackling community tensions upfront*. Guardian Professional. Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/local-government-network/2012/mar/29/uk-riots-resilience-community-tensions>. Accessed on: 24/03/14.

⁴ Harrow, J. (2009) *Leadership and resilience – local communities and services in a time of fragmentation. Are there reasons to be cheerful?* Available at: <http://www.cgap.org.uk/uploads/Edinburgh%20ESRC%20Friday%2030%20October%20Jenny%20Resilience%20Full%20paper.pdf>. Accessed on: 24/03/14.

⁵ This has been described as Place-Shielding. See: Sunderland Partnership (2013) *Sunderland Community Resilience Plan*. Available at: <http://www.sunderlandpartnership.org.uk/documents/CommunityResiliencePlanFinal.pdf>. Accessed on: 20/03/14.

⁶ Hearn Morrow, B. (2008) *Community Resilience: A Social Justice Perspective*. CARRI Research Report 4, Community and Regional Resilience Initiative, Oak Ridge Laboratory, Tennessee. Available at: http://www.resilientus.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/FINAL_MORROW_9-25-08_1223482348.pdf. Accessed on: 26/03/14.

arguing for the equal rights of all segments of society to meet their basic needs and advocating for greater social and economic equality.

On a practical level, the third-sector in the UK, often with backing from local government, has promoted the idea of local communities developing Local Resilience Action Plans (LRAPs) in response to the economic downturn. In March 2009, the National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA) published the *Framework for Developing a Local Resilience Action Plan*⁷ to guide third-sector organisations and community partnerships on how to prepare a local action plan to strengthen the resilience of communities. The purpose of the LRAP is to galvanise communities to 'assess the impact of the recession locally' (in the form of an 'impact assessment') and more critically as a means of identifying 'the capacity for preventative development work' (NAVCA, 2009: 1). In practice, these plans have often been adopted by local community partnerships with support from local authorities.

Although resilience has primarily been conceptualised as a 'bottom-up' response to socio-economic adversity that supports communities to 'beat the odds', it is important to recognise that community or neighbourhood-based resilience approaches cannot on their own fundamentally 'change the odds by removing the causes of adversity' (Ungar, 2008, quoted in Platts-Fowler and Robinson, 2013: 2⁸). As Platts-Fowler and Robinson (2013: 5) comment, the power of local-scale resilience should not be overstated, instead it should be understood as a reactive and adaptive 'strategy' that supports and enables communities:

... to cope with adversity, rather than overturning structural inequalities. Even resilient communities will continue to require the support of public services to mediate the impact of stressors and support the on-going development, engagement and realisation of collective capacity.

This understanding of resilience suggests that no matter how resilient a community is or becomes, its capacity to mobilise public services remains an integral component of mitigating the impact of adverse events and subsequently developing an effective strategy in response. There is a dichotomy here, in that while resilience aims to strengthen communities to make them more self-reliant (particularly in relation to their reliance/over-reliance on the state) and consequently, less susceptible to adverse events, communities on their own cannot become resilient or sustain their resilience without the support of the state and indeed, other civic and civil society institutions. In other words, the wider socio-economic and governmental system is critical to achieving a 'state of resilience'.

It is also important to recognise the political and governance dimensions of resilience. In practice, resilience is often characterised by a 'collective response' to adversity and change (Platts-Fowler and Robinson, 2013). Critical to the effectiveness of this collective response is the building of 'community networks' that enhance a community's ability to cope with challenges, particularly those communities that are oppressed and/or poor (Gilchrist, 2009: 3). As a report by the Scottish Community

⁷ NAVCA (2009) *Framework for developing a Local Resilience Action Plan (LRAP)*. Available at: <http://studylib.net/doc/8471518/local-resilience-action-plan--lrap--framework>. Accessed on 30.10.17.

⁸ Platts-Fowler, D. and Robinson, D. (2013) *Neighbourhood Resilience in Sheffield: Getting By in Hard Times*. Accessed on: 25/03/14. Available at: <http://www4.shu.ac.uk/research/cresr/sites/shu.ac.uk/files/neighbourhood-resilience-sheffield.pdf>.

Development Centre (2011: 3)⁹ observes, community networks can also be ‘communities of shared interest or political identity.’ In other words, the formation of such communities ‘can be seen as a device for collective empowerment’ (Gilchrist, 2009: 3), which enables these networked communities to develop strategies to exert or regain a measure of control over how they are governed. This suggests that facilitating community empowerment to influence the systems and networks of governance must be a critical dimension in the design of any strategy that aims to build and sustain resilient communities.

Criticism and conceptual development

The concept of resilience has been subject to criticism. First, it is evident that there is a lack of clarity (Martin, 2012¹⁰) both conceptually and in practice, making it difficult to distinguish resilience from other related concepts such as community empowerment, community cohesion, community capital and community capacity (Wickes et al, 2010¹¹). In addition, the community resilience focused literature often ignores or neglects to adequately define the concept of community, which has a multitude of definitions and variations in meaning across a wide range of disciplines (Norris et al., 2008; Platts-Fowler and Robinson, 2013). As Harrow (2009: 10)¹² comments:

Much ‘community resilience’ literature tends to leave alone the intriguing and all-embracing nature of ‘community’. This leaves policy makers and community advocates to infer anything and everything from the notion of place and geography to the notion of shared purpose, neither of which may ever be fully fixed.

As mentioned above, resilience is often conceptualised as a reactive process of adaptation and transformation that primarily aims to counter the effects of adversity rather than addressing the fundamental underlying causes of adversity. This is because the conceptual origins of resilience are ‘derived from ecology and systems theory’, which is ‘conservative when applied to the social sphere, referring to the stability of a system against interference’ (Mackinnon and Driscoll Derickson, 2012: 254).¹³ As a consequence, ‘this apolitical ecology not only privileges established social structures, which are often shaped by unequal power relations and injustice ... but also closes off wider questions of progressive social change which require interference with, and transformation of, established systems’ (Mackinnon and Driscoll Derickson, 2012: 254). This criticism suggests that resilience discourses are largely oblivious to questions relating to the existing entrenched inequalities in power

⁹ Scottish Community Development Centre (2011) *Community Resilience and Co-production. Getting to grips with the language. A briefing paper*. Available at: <http://www.scdc.org.uk/media/resources/assets-alliance/Community%20Resilience%20and%20Coproductio%20SCDC%20briefing%20paper.pdf>. Accessed on: 23/03/14.

¹⁰ Martin, R. L. Regional economic resilience, hysteresis and recessionary shocks. *Journal of Economic Geography*, 2012, vol. 12 (pp. 1-32).

¹¹ Wickes, R., Zahnow, R., and Mazerolle, L. (2010) *Community Resilience Research: Current Approaches, Challenges and Opportunities*. Available at: http://hardenup.org/media/348533/final_gap_analysis_pmcreport_211010.pdf. Accessed on: 25/03/14.

¹² Harrow. J. (2009) *Leadership and resilience – local communities and services in a time of fragmentation. Are there reasons to be cheerful?* Available at: <http://www.cgap.org.uk/uploads/Edinburgh%20ESRC%20Friday%2030%20October%20Jenny%20Resilience%20full%20paper.pdf>. Accessed on: 24/03/14.

¹³ MacKinnon, D. and Driscoll Derickson, K. (2012) From resilience to resourcefulness: a critique of resilience policy and activism. *Progress in Human Geography* 37(2), 253-270.

relations, governance and social capital (Weichselgartner and Kelman, 2014: 4), and as a consequence fail to grasp the potential for transformative political action to tackle the fundamental underlying drivers of adversity. As Welsh (2013: 21¹⁴) comments:

... resilience is politically neutral, sitting comfortably with a consensus rhetoric of criticality (certain practices are 'bad' or unsustainable) yet proffering technocratic solutions (of adaptive management) framed within and using the same (capitalist) logic and vocabulary (of capital and services etc.) that those problems result from. Consequently, the resilience discourse can become defined by a set of consensual socio-scientific knowledges that reduce the political to the policing of change ... diverting attention from questions of power, justice or the types of (socio-natural) future that can be envisaged.

From a governmental and policy implementation perspective, resilience is often defined 'externally' and driven 'top-down', by 'state agencies and expert knowledge in spheres such as security, emergency planning, economic development and urban design' (Mackinnon and Driscoll Derickson, 2012: 254).¹⁵ This interpretation of resilience (Weichselgartner and Kelman, 2014¹⁶) places the 'onus on individuals, communities and places to become more resilient and adaptable to a range of external threats', thus serving to 'reproduce the wider social and spatial relations that generate turbulence and inequality' in the first place (Mackinnon and Driscoll Derickson, 2012: 254). What this represents in practice is a shift of responsibility from 'state-based to society-based conceptions of distributed risk and reaction' (Welsh, 2013: 19¹⁷). The concern here is that this reallocation of 'risk and reaction' could by accident or design, result in the state and public agencies abrogating their responsibilities towards citizens and communities, which would have particularly deleterious impacts on the most vulnerable social groups in society. This also draws attention to the fact that the 'ability to be resilient is never distributed homogenously within and through social groups ... [but] is largely determined by social, economic and cultural factors' (Weichselgartner and Kelman, 2014: 252).

It is clear that many of the 'processes driving and shaping resilience operate on larger or smaller scales than the urban or national scale – and they often vary between scales' (Weichselgartner and Kelman, 2014: 258). Viewed from a spatial perspective, some human geographers (Mackinnon and Driscoll Derickson, 2012) have also criticised resilience for being overly focused on the adaptiveness of places¹⁸, especially those at the sub-national, local and neighbourhood spatial scales. Once again, the failure of resilience theorising to account for the critical influence and place-shaping impacts of neo-liberal global capitalism is evident here. As Mackinnon and Driscoll Derickson (2012: 254) argue:

... the concern with the resilience of places is misconceived in terms of spatial scale. Here, resilience policy seems to rely on an underlying local-global divide whereby different scales such as the national, regional, urban and local are defined as arenas for ensuring adaptability in the

¹⁴ Welsh, M. Resilience and responsibility: governing uncertainty in a complex world. *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 180, No. 1, March 2014, pp. 15-26.

¹⁵ MacKinnon, D. and Driscoll Derickson, K. (2012) From resilience to resourcefulness: a critique of resilience policy and activism. *Progress in Human Geography* 37(2), 253-270.

¹⁶ Weichselgartner, J. and Kelman, I. Geographies of resilience: challenges and opportunities of a descriptive concept. *Progress in Human Geography*, April 2014, 38(2).

¹⁷ Welsh, M. Resilience and responsibility: governing uncertainty in a complex world. *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 180, No. 1, March 2014, pp. 15-26.

¹⁸ What Weichselgartner and Kelman (2014: 258) describe as the 'resilience of place approach.'

face of immutable global threats. This fosters an internalist conception which locates the sources of resilience as lying within the particular scale in question, [while failing to recognise that] the processes which shape resilience operate primarily at the scale of capitalist social relations (i.e. [the] national and trans-national).

Weichselgartner and Kelman (2014: 258) also share similar concerns:

... regarding the mobilizing discourse of resilience that places the responsibility squarely on communities and regions to further adapt to the logic and implications of global capitalism and many other influences external from their own control.

While some of the critique of resilience (much of it from a human geography perspective) has been sceptical about its potential to produce transformative and long-term change, along with a perceived failure to challenge and offer an alternative governance and socio-economic model to the neoliberal paradigm, other scholars argue that the concept still has utility both theoretically and empirically. Weichselgartner and Kelman (2014: 260) argue that the concept can be rehabilitated and ‘a starting point for potential change lies in disclosing the full range of resilience thinking and embracing the frequently ignored social-political aspects.’ Welsh (2013) also highlights how new, more radical approaches to resilience are now emerging in the realm of socio-ecological theory, which do aim to challenge aspects of the established neo-liberal and global capitalism orthodoxy (Mackinnon and Driscoll Derickson, 2012). As Welsh (2013: 22) comments:

There exists a growing literature on socio-technical transitions which in socio-ecological resilience research has focused on transition management towards the normative goal of sustainability. Recognising the capacity of systems to change, and the significance of system resilience as both a constrainer and enabler of alternative regimes, resilience is reconceived as an analytical framework for examining [and as a means of mobilising] change itself.

This new interpretation of resilience, particularly in response to global resource depletion and climate change, has been advanced and articulated by mainly grassroots environmental campaign groups and social movements such as the Transition Network.¹⁹ This social movement has sought to utilise resilience as an ‘organising principle’ around which communities can transition to a ‘localised low carbon future’ (Welsh, 2013: 22). Based on this perspective, the Carnegie UK Trust has produced a Handbook (Exploring community resilience: in a time of rapid change²⁰), which sets out a framework and modus operandi explaining how people can work together to ‘future-proof their communities on the basis of agreed values’ (Wilding, 2011: 4). The second part of the Handbook outlines a ‘compass’ of community resilience based on interlinked objectives (or ‘four crucial dimensions of resilience building’):

1. *healthy engaged people*: supporting individuals’ physical and psychological well-being;
2. *an inclusive and creative culture*: generating a positive and welcoming sense of place;
3. *a localised economy operating within ecological limits*: securing entrepreneurial community stewardship of local assets and institutions;

¹⁹ For more information on the Transition Network see: Hopkins, R. and Lipman, P. (2009) *Who we are and what we do*. Totnes: Transition Network Ltd.

²⁰ Wilding, N. (2011) *Exploring community resilience: in a time of rapid change*. Dunfermline, Carnegie Trust.

4. *cross-community links*: fostering of supportive inter-community links ('collaborate with other communities near and far – we know no place can go it alone') (Wilding, 2011: 30).

Proponents of this approach to community resilience hope that it will lead to a 'break through'²¹ that will 'create communities which are more resilient in the context of future challenges' (Wilding, 2011: 4).

However, in common with other interpretations and discourses of resilience, this 'transition-resilience' approach 'tends to operate through a kind of inclusive localism that is largely apolitical and pragmatic in character' (Mackinnon and Driscoll Derickson, 2012: 9). Welsh (2013: 20) also agrees with this analysis that a dynamic and game-changing 'politics of resilience' has yet to emerge:

These resilience approaches operate on the normative assumption that communities can and should self-organise to deal with uncertainty, that uncertainty is a given not something with a political dimension, and the role of government is limited to enabling, shaping and supporting, but specifically not to direct or to fund those processes. This locates the responsibility of 'communities' as needing to organise themselves, primarily in the context of sustaining economic growth. As a consequence, there is little sign of a profound engagement with a politics of resilience as a means for conceiving of change; of revolution through resilience.

This raises a question mark about whether such 'transition-management' movements can initiate the hoped for transformative paradigm shift at the macro-scale, which their advocates claim.

The dominance of place

As mentioned above, the resilience literature has typically adopted 'a place-based notion of community, with a particular focus on the neighbourhood level' (Platts-Fowler and Robinson, 2013: 6). This spatial focus is encapsulated in the notion of neighbourhood resilience. Platts-Fowler and Robinson (2013: 7) have adapted Magis's (2010) definition of community resilience and use the concept of neighbourhood resilience, which is defined as 'the existence, development and engagement of local resources by community members to thrive in an environment characterised by change, uncertainty, unpredictability, and surprise.' The concept of neighbourhood resilience draws attention to the nature and differences associated with territorial space, particularly the impact of place. As Platts-Fowler and Robinson (2013: 8) explain, neighbourhood resilience conceptualises: 'how the different aspects of a place - manifest as the resources available to a local community - interact to determine the resilience of a community to specific stressors and pressures.' In this sense, the neighbourhood is the main functional and social space within which much of the everyday social interaction takes place and it is a scale that contains key resources or assets that can be utilised by both individuals and groups in response to adverse events or change.

In addition, the neighbourhood is a bounded policy space, representing 'a tangible material setting and discernible target for interventions designed to promote resilience in the face of social and economic stress' (Platts-Fowler and Robinson, 2013: 7). In this sense, it provides policy makers with a clearly delimited and convenient human-scale geography within which interventions can be targeted,

²¹ Presumably meaning that this approach will be widely adopted and lead to a change in public attitudes and practice towards sustainable living.

measured and the efficacy of policy outcomes evaluated. This analytical focus on the neighbourhood is intended to gain a better understanding of variations in outcomes between different places or geographies, and hence explain why some neighbourhoods or communities can be characterised as being more resilient than others (Centre for Local Economic Strategies, 2013²²).

It is important to note that this approach neglects those communities or populations that are not geographical or territorial/place-based or are perhaps transient in nature. There are communities of identity or culture (e.g. ethnic or religious groups) and communities of practice or professions/trades (e.g. local government officers, doctors or trades unions). Furthermore, there are communities of place, in which certain groups of people within defined geographical areas come together to collaborate. However, there are also transient communities (e.g. travellers). Communities of circumstance are those consisting of people brought together by external events or situations, whilst communities of interest exist among people who share the same interest or passion. In addition, communities of action are those in which people try to effect change. In recent years the phenomenon of cyber or non-territorial communities have emerged, particularly with the growing use of social media as an organising medium for social movements and community action.

Examples of resilience approaches in local government

Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council

Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council in the Merseyside area is a relatively small local authority bordering Liverpool with a population of 146,000.²³ Knowsley has a number of low-income and disadvantaged communities. The Council has operationalised a resilience approach to support local communities experiencing 'financial pressures' (e.g. local food prices, fuel prices and utility bills). Underpinning Knowsley's approach has been the establishment of the Resilience Monitor, a quarterly publication that tracks and analyses 'the main indicators of economic pressures' (Knowsley Council, 2012²⁴) affecting local communities, a taxonomy that includes the labour market, household finances and personal debt, crime, educational attainment, population, diversity and community cohesion (Knowsley Council, 2013²⁵). This innovative development has served as a data collection, analytical and assessment tool to gain a more informed understanding of the impacts of austerity on different communities and geographies across Knowsley. From this analysis the Council identified an interesting characteristic of some communities in Knowsley, in that:

... residents record higher than average levels of personal and community resilience. This pattern has been observed in some older working class communities and is labelled the wellbeing and resilience paradox. Further analysis could reveal whether this can be seen as a positive community asset or a signifier that the Borough's residents have merely become accustomed to adversity and lowered their expectations accordingly (Resilience Monitor, Spring 2013, p.17).

²² Centre for Local Economic Strategies (2013) *Understanding Community Resilience*. Available at: <http://www.cles.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Final-Report-Feb13.pdf>. Accessed on: 15/03/14.

²³ For more information see:

http://www.knowsley.gov.uk/pdf/NEW_SD31_SubNationalPopulationProjections_Update_2.pdf.

²⁴ Knowsley Council (2012) *Knowsley Resilience Monitor, Winter 2012/2013*. Available at: <http://www.knowsley.gov.uk/pdf/resilience-monitor-winter-2012-2013.pdf>. Accessed on: 25/01/16.

²⁵ Knowsley Council (2013) *Knowsley Resilience Monitor, Summer 2013*. Available at: <http://www.knowsley.gov.uk/pdf/RESILIENCE-MONITOR-Summer-2013.pdf>. Accessed on: 14/03/14.

Knowsley has also sought to incorporate resilience into other community-focused Council policy agendas. The Council's Community Empowerment Framework (Knowsley Council, 2012²⁶) makes a direct link between empowerment and resilience, stating that 'an empowered community will be resilient to change' (p.4). Enhancing resilience is also seen as a corrective to reducing the dependency of local communities on public service provision (Knowsley Council, 2012).

From a public health perspective, NHS Knowsley and Knowsley Council have adopted 'an asset or strength based approach to promoting health and wellbeing', which aims to identify and harness the potential of 'physical and community (people) assets' of local areas that can be deployed to improve a community's health and wellbeing outcomes.²⁷ As an important dimension of the Borough's social growth and community empowerment agendas, this asset-based approach underpins the overarching goal of developing communities that are resilient to both socio-economic and health challenges. Allied to this, the Council's social value statement aims to exploit 'procurement and other related activities to enable communities to become more resilient and reduce demand on public services' (Knowsley Council, 2013: 1).²⁸ As part of the social value model, resilience is defined as an 'outcome' that is measured against eight social values covering a breadth of issues such as skills levels, people in work, income, offenders in employment/training and newly constituted community groups.²⁹

Knowsley is an example of a local authority that has deployed resilience as a conceptual theme running through and linking together a range of local policy agendas. Resilience is also seen as the desired outcome of policy actions. However, more prosaic and immediate concerns drive Knowsley's resilience agenda in that the Council's fundamental aim is to reduce overall demand on hard-pressed public services in a fiscal environment of annual retractions in local government expenditure by making communities less dependent on the local state and ultimately more self-sufficient and sustainable in the future.

Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council

Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council in the Merseyside area has a population of 274,000.³⁰ There are a number of deprived wards in the Borough. The Council, working in co-operation with its key local partners on Sefton Borough Partnership Operations Board, is developing 'a sustainable model for community resilience' (Cabinet Members Welfare Reform Reference Group, 2013: 12³¹). To this end, the Council has asked its partners 'to consider where they may be able to play a role in supporting

²⁶ Knowsley Council (2012) *Community Empowerment Framework*. Available at: <http://www.knowsley.gov.uk/pdf/Community-empowerment-framework.pdf>. Accessed on: 14/03/14.

²⁷ Knowsley Council and NHS Knowsley (2012) *Building on Community Strengths in Knowsley*. Available at: <http://www.knowsley.gov.uk/pdf/knowsley-JSAA-report.pdf>. Accessed on: 17/03/14.

²⁸ Knowsley Council (2013) *Social Value Statement*. Available at: <https://www.knowsley.gov.uk/your-council/policies,-plans-and-strategies/people/social-value>. Accessed on: 12/02/16.

²⁹ For the full list of the social value measures see: <http://www.knowsley.gov.uk/pdf/social-value-model.pdf>.

³⁰ Sefton MBC (2015) *Sefton Labour Market Profile*, December 2015. Available at: <http://www.investsefton.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Sefton-Labour-Market-Profile-December-2015.pdf>. Accessed on: 17/02/16.

³¹ Cabinet Members Welfare Reform Reference Group (2013) *Welfare Reform Update, 18 July 2013*. Available at: <http://modgov.sefton.gov.uk/moderngov/documents/s47537/Welfare%20Reform%20Update.pdf>. Accessed on: 17/03/14.

communities to become more resilient, particularly as resources available to the Council and partners reduces in relation to service provision.’³²

Propelling the Council’s drive to promote resilience are the ‘unprecedented reductions in its budget, coupled with significant reductions in resources available to other organisations and the impact of national government policies such as Welfare Reform.’³³ However, there is also an implicit moral imperative and anti-dependency narrative underlying this agenda, in that resilience and self-reliance of both individuals and communities are viewed as an antidote to the dependency culture and an over-reliance on local government support. Sefton has defined resilience:

as possessing a set of skills and having access to resources that allow us to negotiate challenges that we all experience. It’s also about being able to use the skills that allow people to overcome the more difficult circumstances many of Sefton’s people face.³⁴

Central to this understanding of resilience is the notion of individual or personal resilience, that is, individuals need to develop resilient characteristics to endure in the face of adversity and be capable of self-help to overcome the challenges they are experiencing. However, personal resilience is predicated on individuals living in supportive and resilient communities where there exists strong social bonds and relationships, as well as economic security.

Sefton embarked on an exercise to identify a framework for community resilience and developed a set of key principles to inform their resilience-focused activities. These inceptive principles are based on the characteristics of communities relating to their geography, population types and the challenges they face such as economic deprivation, social isolation, poor health and crime. Much of the focus of the resilience development work will be directed towards those communities that are most at risk and vulnerable to external and internal pressures. In this regard, the ‘intention is to empower communities who can support themselves to do so through reasonable freedoms and reducing blockages, but also to identify those communities that require some level of short term intervention to enable them to become more resilient and act accordingly.’³⁵ It is important to stress that Sefton define communities in both a geographical sense (i.e. the ‘locality’) and as communities of ‘interest’ or ‘broader, dependent upon the issue’.³⁶

As mentioned above, another aim of the resilience approach adopted by Sefton is to reduce the dependency of communities on local authority service provision. To achieve this, the Council is

³² Sefton Council, Cabinet Member Update Report, Overview & Scrutiny Committee (Performance & Corporate Services) May 2013. *Corporate Commissioning and Neighbourhood Co-ordination* (p.4). Available at: <http://modgov.sefton.gov.uk/moderngov/documents/s46849/Cabinet%20Member%20-%20Communities%20and%20Environment%20Corporate%20Commissioning%20Neighbourhood%20Co-ordination%20.pdf>. Accessed on: 18/03/14.

³³ Sefton Borough Partnership Operations Board, 11 June 2013. *Building Community Resilience* (p.1). Available at: <http://modgov.sefton.gov.uk/moderngov/documents/s46993/Community%20Resilience.pdf>. Accessed on: 18/02/16.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Sefton Council, Cabinet Member Update Report, Overview & Scrutiny Committee (Performance & Corporate Services), May 2013. *Corporate Commissioning and Neighbourhood Co-ordination* (p.4). Available at: <http://modgov.sefton.gov.uk/documents/s46849/Cabinet%20Member%20-%20Communities%20and%20Environment%20Corporate%20Commissioning%20Neighbourhood%20Co-ordination%20.pdf>. Accessed on: 18/03/14.

³⁶ Ibid, (p.4).

exploring ways to ‘support communities to become more resilient through strengthening neighbourhood based organisations and services.’³⁷

Sefton is an example of an authority that is developing a partnership approach to resilience across a breadth of policy spheres. The Council and its partners have also established dedicated institutional structures (the Welfare Reform Partners Group which is a sub-group of the Sefton Borough Partnership Operations Board, the Council’s Cabinet Members Welfare Reform Reference Group and Sefton Health and Wellbeing Board) to drive forward, co-ordinate and maintain oversight over resilience work-streams.³⁸ It is important to recognise that development of the resilience framework and embedding this into policy interventions is an evolving process. However, in response to diminished resources, at a practical level, the Council and its partners have already implemented or are developing a range of ‘austerity resilience’ measures. For instance, the Council set aside £1 million in the financial year 2013-14 to support resilience by enabling community organisations to provide local services that are self-sustaining.³⁹

Resilience has also been identified as an important outcome of public health policy in the Borough. One of the strategic objectives for Health and Wellbeing identified by Sefton Health and Wellbeing Board is to ‘build capacity and resilience to empower and strengthen communities.’⁴⁰ Sefton is an example of an authority that is seeking to develop a comprehensive approach to resilience, driven largely by the exigencies of public spending austerity.

Newham Borough Council

Newham Borough Council in Greater London has developed an ambitious strategy to embed community, economic and personal resilience across the Borough. Newham’s approach to resilience is radical and far reaching, aiming to transform the status of the second most deprived local authority area in the UK by ‘making sure everything we do works together to build resilience and being sensitive to how our policies and activities have an impact on personal skills, local relationships and the broader economic environment.’⁴¹

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Resilience is also recognised in the Sefton Economic Strategy 2012-22, an objective of which is to diversify the local economy to make it more resilient to economic shocks. See: http://www.investsefton.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/SES_Economic_Strategy20121.pdf.

³⁹ Examples of schemes include: funding for volunteer support for the Citizens Advice Bureau; refurbishment of Crosby Youth Centre and the installation of heating at the Caradoc Mission; and a Church that provides a range of community services in the Seaforth area (e.g. a kids’ club, community garden and foodbank). Sefton Council (2014) *Cabinet Member Update Report O&S (Performance & Corporate Services)*, 14th January 2014. Corporate commissioning and neighbourhood co-ordination. Available at: <http://modgov.sefton.gov.uk/moderngov/documents/s50253/Comm%20Env%20report.pdf>. Accessed on: 17/03/14.

⁴⁰ Sefton Council (2013) *Sefton’s Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2013 - 2018 (Summary Document)*. Available at: <http://modgov.sefton.gov.uk/moderngov/documents/b17727/Supplementary%20Agenda%2022nd-Jan-2013%2014.30%20Sefton%20Borough%20Partnership%20Operations%20Board.pdf?T=9>. Accessed on: 18/03/14.

⁴¹ See: Newham Council website. *Resilience*. Available at: <http://www.newham.gov.uk/Pages/Services/Resilience.aspx>. Accessed on: 18/03/14.

Underpinning Newham's approach is a critique of the welfare state, which is viewed as contributing to a 'culture of dependency' that has led to some individuals in the Borough losing the capacity to help themselves. In this regard, the Council argues that:

Large swathes of our population have been de-skilled and isolated from the networks of peer support and expertise that can help them overcome poverty. The welfare state has played a part by doing things for people but not asking for anything in return, by focusing on need not ability or potential, and by failing to make communities and context a part of welfare policy. We believe this issue is best described as a lack of resilience.⁴²

By focusing on resilience as a guiding principle it:

... enables us to build on concepts such as capabilities and empowerment as well as to consider the importance of the environment people live in. The term comes from work in academia which emphasises certain skills and resources in improving life chances. The core components of resilience underpin much of the recent debate ... about social mobility.⁴³

The Newham approach identifies three strands of resilience: personal, community and economic. Personal resilience is defined as 'an individual's qualities or abilities that enable them to deal with adversity and access resources and support to succeed.'⁴⁴ Community resilience refers to supportive networks and relationships that individuals can utilise to access a range of advice, skills, knowledge and to establish connections. Economic resilience is defined as a means of ensuring that individuals have 'stable, decently paid work and the economic resources to cope with emergencies and make genuine choices'⁴⁵ about their lives.

In practical terms, Newham has developed a range of initiatives in each of these strands of resilience. In relation to economic resilience, the Council has developed an employment service, known as Workplace, which was launched 2008. Planned investment in this programme in 2014 will be £6 million. Workplace provides a 'holistic service to address all the barriers that prevent people from moving into work', which offers 'personalised careers advice, help finding training or education courses and personal support to overcome low levels of confidence or self-esteem'.⁴⁶ Staff on the programme work closely with local employers to identify the specific skills they require to fill current vacancies, 'rather than generic up-skilling', as is the case with national employment programmes.⁴⁷ The Council claim that the programme has been a success in terms of sustainable jobs when compared with national programmes, with around three-quarters of '16,000' clients supported to date remaining in employment.⁴⁸ While acknowledging that the Council is still drawing on research and

⁴² Newham Council (2011) *A Strong Community: Building Resilience in Newham*. Available at: <http://www.newham.gov.uk/Documents/Council%20and%20Democracy/AStrongCommunityBuildingResilienceinNewham.pdf> (p.5).

⁴³ Ibid, (p.6).

⁴⁴ Ibid (p.6).

⁴⁵ See: Newham Council website. *Resilience*. Available at: <http://www.newham.gov.uk/Pages/Services/Resilience.aspx>. Accessed on: 18/03/14.

⁴⁶ Newham Council (2012) *Resilience Making it happen. An update on delivery*. Available at: <http://www.newham.gov.uk/Documents/Council%20and%20Democracy/MakingResilienceHappenanupdateonndelivery.pdf> (p.11). Accessed on: 19/03/14.

⁴⁷ Ibid (p.9)

⁴⁸ Ibid (p.9)

evidence to inform the development of its personal resilience agenda, it has introduced a range of policy interventions. First, the Life Changing Fund aims to provide small loans to residents, so that they can make positive changes to move forward their lives. Examples given include paying for the cost of an exam entry to enable a person to obtain a professional qualification, driving lessons so an individual can develop their career (presumably where travelling and access to a vehicle are a requisite aspect of the job) or a deposit to rent accommodation closer to a job.⁴⁹ Council staff are expected to work closely and intensively with clients on a one-to-one basis, and build strong and trusted relationships with individuals. The programme is designed to be flexible and responsive to client needs. It will be piloted initially and have a budget of £150,000. The programme is viewed by the Council as a 'relational approach' to public service provision, which

... aims to build personal resilience by making people active participants in solving the problems they face. We must end the transactional model that too often forces service users to be passive recipients.⁵⁰

While the Life Changing Fund is viewed partly as an experimental approach to supporting personal resilience, a more tried and tested intervention is the provision of free school meals as a means of supporting educational attainment. Newham provides free school meals to 3,300 households with children identified as living in poverty, who are not eligible under the national scheme.⁵¹ In addition, the Council has introduced the 'Every Newham Child, a Reader Guarantee',⁵² which supports the universal teaching of phonics in participating local schools. So far, the data suggest that the scheme has improved phonics results in the schools.

The theme of universalism in public service provision underpins Newham's child-focused interventions:

By delivering universal services ... we can tackle the root causes of disadvantage by developing young people's resilience – giving them the skills, abilities, qualifications and aspirations to achieve their potential, get the most out of their education and have control over their decisions and life direction.⁵³

In terms of resilience, much of the initial focus of Newham's activities has been to undertake research to 'map networks in three wards and build our understanding of the values and motivations of local people.'⁵⁴ Much of this resilience work has been carried out via Community Hubs, which are intended to provide a focal point for communities and to enhance local networking. In addition, the hubs are intended to offer greater flexibility and innovation in local service delivery. In this regard, the hubs act as:

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid (p.17).

⁵¹ Ibid (p.18).

⁵² This scheme forms part of the wider Every Child programme (p.22).

⁵³ Newham Council (2012) *Resilience Making it happen. An update on delivery*. Available at: <http://www.newham.gov.uk/Documents/Council%20and%20Democracy/MakingResilienceHappenanupdateonndelivery.pdf> (p.23). Accessed on: 19/03/14.

⁵⁴ Ibid (p.27).

...localised networks bringing together physical assets like libraries and community centres with social assets like volunteering and sports activities. A core goal of the hubs is to increase people's networks and get more people involved in the community.⁵⁵

The performance of the hubs will be monitored via feedback from a local survey. This will evaluate whether individuals have developed a greater sense of belonging and whether the number of events or community activities have increased through the hubs.

The hubs will be responsive to bottom-up initiatives and ideas from individuals or groups within local communities and in doing so, it is hoped that this will fundamentally reshape the relationship between the Council and its residents. Newham believe that the hubs will lead to a situation where 'local people can proactively approach us with ideas, from setting up sports teams or street parties to cookery lessons or befriending older residents'.⁵⁶ Newham's volunteering programme will run alongside the hubs initiative, to provide an additional supplement to Council services and activities. An example of local volunteering action is the Affordable Warmth Champions, who seek to identify individuals in their neighbourhood who might be at risk of fuel poverty.

Newham is an example of a local authority that has developed a comprehensive resilience strategy and approach, which informs all aspects of the Council's work. At the heart of the resilience agenda in Newham is a philosophy that there are clearly defined limits to the interventionist role of the local and national state. Based on this view, resilience is primarily a characteristic of individuals and communities, where the role of the 'enabling Council' is to create some of the conditions and provide supporting interventions that will promote personal, economic and community resilience. Over time this will enable communities and individuals to become self-reliant. In this regard:

The Council has a role in building capabilities and capacity, in market-shaping and in setting certain parameters, but outside of that we should let people make decisions about what is best for themselves, their family and their community freely. For vulnerable residents our support will always be needed, for others we need to stop doing things for them and give them responsibility and control.⁵⁷

While the Council is keen to foster personal and community resilience and self-reliance, it could be argued that some of the policies adopted by Newham are in fact examples of an active and interventionist local state. Indeed, by developing a range of local programmes to supplement national government initiatives (e.g. the Workplace programme and Newham's supplementary school meals policy), Newham is clearly widening the local state's traditional role in social, welfare and employment provision.

In summary, Newham Borough is attempting to develop a comprehensive resilience approach, with the Council: 'committed to include resilience in everything we do as a council.'⁵⁸ This commitment is

⁵⁵ Ibid (p.32).

⁵⁶ Ibid (p.33).

⁵⁷ Newham Council (2011) *A Strong Community: Building Resilience in Newham*. Available at: <http://www.newham.gov.uk/Documents/Council%20and%20Democracy/AStrongCommunityBuildingResiliencinNewham.pdf> (p.14).

⁵⁸ See: Newham Council website. *Resilience*. Available at: <http://www.newham.gov.uk/Pages/Services/Resilience.aspx>. Accessed on: 18/03/14.

politically driven, with Newham's Executive Mayor Sir Robin Wales, giving his personal backing to the resilience agenda. The Mayor regards resilience as 'about recognising the overlapping and interconnected ways that different elements of people's lives and community affect their life chances.'⁵⁹ Rhetorically at least, a core component of this agenda is nothing less than the transformation of the traditional philosophy about the role and purpose of local service provision and local government's relationship with citizens:

We were critical of transactional services that do not make people active participants in tackling the issues they face or get to the real root of problems. We argued that we need a more relational and personalised way of working.'⁶⁰

While this new 'relational' form of governance - which is couched in a discourse of community empowerment - clearly represents a departure from traditional practices in local government, it is too early to assess whether it will prove to be a successful innovation in local governance.

Blackburn with Darwen Council

Blackburn with Darwen (BwD) Council and its partners have sought to integrate the concept of community resilience into their public health strategy and public service provision more generally. The Council has sought to develop an assets-based approach to support communities and improve health outcomes. Blackburn with Darwen Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2012-2015 (p.10)⁶¹, states that the area:

...will look beyond needs to examine how local assets, including the community itself, can be used to meet identified needs. We will achieve this by developing an 'assets strategy', which recognises and reinforces the fundamental importance of identifying and making use of existing strengths and assets in underpinning wellbeing and improved health and community resilience.

One interesting aspect of the Council's approach is that it draws on and support existing reserves of community resilience in BwD, that have built up over time in many deprived and low-incomes communities who have experienced and coped with challenge and adversity. This inter-generational resilience is understood as a potential community resource, which is often overlooked and poorly understood by policy-makers (Harrison, 2013⁶²). The Council has developed long-term priorities for the Borough in its Vision 2030 exercise. One of the eight outcome targets identified in Vision 2030 is to 'increased community cohesion and resilience' in the Borough.⁶³ In the context of Blackburn with

⁵⁹ Newham Council (2012) *Resilience Making it happen. An update on delivery*. Available at: <http://www.newham.gov.uk/Documents/Council%20and%20Democracy/MakingResilienceHappenanupdateondelivery.pdf> (p. 5). Accessed on: 19/03/14.

⁶⁰ Ibid (p.7).

⁶¹ NHS Blackburn with Darwen CCG/Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council (2012). *Blackburn with Darwen Joint Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2012-2015*. Available at: <http://www.blackburnwithdarwenccg.nhs.uk/download/publications/HWBStrategy2012.pdf>. Accessed on: 03/11/17.

⁶² Harrison, D. (2013) *Cuts, community resilience and the new relationship between state and citizens'*. Presentation to Blackburn with Darwen CVS AGM. Available at: <http://www.bwdcvs.org.uk/bwdcvs/cvs-agm-2013-download-the-presentations/>. Accessed on: 19/03/14.

⁶³ Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council (2010) *Community Cohesion Strategy 2010 - 2013*. Available at: <https://www.blackburn.gov.uk/Lists/DownloadableDocuments/1813-DL-Community-Cohesion-Strategy.pdf> (p.26). Accessed on 03/11/14.

Darwen, resilience is primarily understood as an end goal or outcome target rather than an integral part of the policy-making process or a comprehensive aspect of corporate strategic management.

Sunderland City Council

Sunderland City Council, in conjunction with Sunderland Partnership, has developed a Community Resilience Plan. This plan attempts to operationalise the concept of community resilience as a process by which the Council and other key agencies can support communities across Sunderland to manage the impacts of economic adversity and change: 'in Sunderland, the concept has become associated with significant economic and social shock, specifically in response to the economic downturn and the public sector reform, including changes to the benefits system.'⁶⁴ Set within the context of a city that has gone through significant socio-economic transition and restructuring since World War Two, the Plan is intended to guide the activities of the partner organisations within the Sunderland Partnership and other key players to harness the 'strengths of our city and our communities to help people adapt to change and create a better quality of life for all.'⁶⁵ The overlying narrative and philosophy of the plan is presented in terms of the diminishing power of the state in an era of austerity, which necessitates a transformational shift in the delivery of public services:

... the public sector no longer has the capacity to meet the needs of all citizens in the future. It is widely accepted that maintaining the status quo is no longer an option and transformational change is needed within organisations as well as communities. The role of local authorities and their partners is necessarily shifting towards a new focus on enabling rather than always delivering.⁶⁶

Interestingly the concept of an 'enabling authority' harks back to the 1980s and the ideas of the former Conservative minister Nicholas Ridley, who argued that the primary function of local government should be to commission and set the strategic framework for local service delivery rather than act as a frontline service provider.⁶⁷

Creating the conditions to reduce dependency on the state and increase self-sufficiency are identified as key goals in Sunderland: 'at its heart, the Community Resilience Plan is about enabling a transition to greater independence so that communities become more self-sufficient and less reliant on the public sector in the longer term.'⁶⁸ Underpinning the delivery of the Plan is an assets-based approach, which aims to 'identify and build on the specific strengths of each community, so that the abilities and insights of local residents become resources for tackling individual and collective challenges.'⁶⁹ The Plan is also predicated on a notion of community empowerment in that: 'An important objective of public services is to foster resilience by empowering people and communities to create their own future and take responsibility for the direction of their lives and their local area.'

⁶⁴ Sunderland Partnership (2013) *Sunderland Community Resilience Plan*. Available at: <http://www.sunderlandpartnership.org.uk/documents/CommunityResiliencePlanFinal.pdf> (no page numbers). Accessed on 20/03/14.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ridley, N. (1988) *The local Right: enabling not providing*. Centre for Policy Studies: London.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

The political and social implications of austerity are not overlooked. The Plan recognises that difficult choices will need to be made, based on a 'prioritisation of needs' that will initially give priority to the most vulnerable communities and individuals, where resilience is weakest:

Our approach is founded on the recognition that basic needs must be met before a person can focus on any other aspect of their life. Our first priority must therefore be those needs which relate to a person's physical health and survival – food, clothes, accommodation, and essential utilities such as water, electricity and gas. Resources may have to be redirected from generic programmes to more targeted activities that ensure the most urgent needs within the city are met. In the first instance, we will consider whether additional support or new activity needs to be targeted to particular neighbourhoods, groups or populations with lower levels of resilience.⁷⁰

As with other local authorities who have pursued a comprehensive agenda of resilience, Sunderland City Council present resilience as having the potential to bring about transformative changes in the nature and practice of local governance. However, one reading of the community resilience agenda in Sunderland is that it provides a framework and discourse to underpin an agenda of managing an overall reduction in service provision, along with a redirection of scarce resources towards deprived or 'less resilient' communities. This implies that 'more resilient' or stronger communities would receive fewer resources and less support from the authority.

Lancashire County Council

Lancashire County Council (LCC) is the largest local authority in the North West in terms of population, with over 1.1 million people residing in the county. The Council encompasses a wide and varied geography covering cities, towns and rural communities of various types and the county is a place of stark social and economic contrasts.⁷¹

Lancashire has integrated resilience into its Corporate Strategy primarily as a high level strategic objective. Two of the Council's priorities identified in the Corporate Strategy relate to strengthening resilience: 'Support communities in Lancashire to become self-resilient; Work in partnership with all other agencies to make local communities strong, self-reliant and cohesive' (Lancashire County Council, 2015: 7).⁷² Accordingly, council service provision and resources will be re-aligned to these priorities. LCC recognises that within an austerity driven fiscal environment, the authority will have insufficient capacity to deliver the current range and level of services across its varied geography. Concomitantly the draft Corporate Strategy predicts that there is likely to be increased demand for statutory services, especially from deprived communities where the impacts of austerity measures have often been the most deleterious.

Once again, a familiar theme emerges in that the primary driver of resilience in Lancashire are the acute public expenditure pressures facing the authority. The strategy explicates a new 'whole Lancashire' partnership approach to commissioning of services that will involve joint commissioning, design and delivery of services with partners across different sectors in the county. Acting in an

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Lancashire County Council (2014) *Equality, Cohesion and Integration Strategy 2014-2017*. Available at: <http://www.lancashire.gov.uk/media/399212/Equality-Cohesion-and-Integration-strategy-2014-17-final-April-14.pdf> Accessed on: 01/03/16.

⁷² Lancashire County Council (2015) Corporate Strategy (Draft) November 2015. Available at: <http://council.lancashire.gov.uk/documents/s77110/LCC%20Corporate%20Strategy%202015%20Appendix%20A%20final.pdf>. Accessed on: 23/02/16.

enabling capacity, LCC will support the voluntary, community and faith sectors to address areas of priority local need. One anticipated beneficial by-product of this approach will be the 'development of social networks within communities that results in individual, families and the wider community building a 'resilience' that can enhance people's ability to cope with difficulties and make informed choices' (Lancashire County Council, 2015: 10).

As well as being directed at communities, policy actions and services supporting resilience will also be targeted towards specific cohorts of the population to promote personal and family responsibility, with the aim that individuals and families will become self-reliant, and consequently less dependent on interventions from the local authority. However, there is a caveat in that self-reliance and resilience will be promoted in circumstances:

...wherever this is a realistic aspiration. Where support is needed, our services should be focused on pro-active interventions that allow individuals and families to become independent quickly, and not require long-term support from the council (Lancashire County Council, 2015: 10).

The 'strategic outcome' of Lancashire's resilience agenda is ultimately to improve population health across the county, although this will necessitate a combination of offering a 'universal standard' or core service provision, aligned with selective targeted interventions aimed at the most vulnerable communities and individuals. Lancashire's draft Corporate Strategy (2015: 12) presents an ambitious and arguably idealised picture of the kind of resilient communities the authority is endeavouring to create:

People in resilient communities will have satisfaction and pride in their local areas, feel safe, have access to green space and an ability to influence decisions. We will work with communities to identify and solve local issues, listening to people and allowing them to influence what is delivered.

LCC has deployed the concept of resilience as both a strategic outcome target and more generally as a core theme traversing through and informing a range of high level strategies. Underpinning Lancashire's approach is a philosophy that communities should be 'weaned-off' dependency on public funding and service provision in an era where universalism of provision is no longer deemed a tenable option. This ambition will be achieved by fostering the development of sustainable community self-reliance and a culture of self-help that will also potentially have an ancillary benefit of stimulating increased community influence over local decision-making.

Conclusion: the influence of the resilience agenda on local government

Seen from a local government perspective, in recent years the concept of resilience has broadened out from a narrow focus relating to emergency planning issues to one associated with the capabilities of communities to cope with and adapt to socio-economic stressors. This notion of resilience (in some cases referred to as community resilience) has emerged mainly in response to the effects of the 2008 economic recession (driven by the financial and banking crisis), and the subsequent 'austerity' measures resulting from the historically significant retraction in public spending by the state since around 2007. In England, local government funding has experienced one of the largest proportionate retractions in public spending, a factor that has inhibited the capacity of local authorities to mitigate the effects of the recession (e.g. cuts in welfare expenditure) in their local areas. In this context of

austerity, the concept of resilience with its emphasis on fostering community and individual self-reliance, drawing on and maximising the potential of endogenous resources, and developing social and inter-organisational collaborative relationships to facilitate joint working and the pooling of resources and expertise, has obvious appeal to the local government sector. Nevertheless, concerns have been expressed that resilience could be used by local authorities as a means of ‘buck passing’ (Tizard, 2012) or as an abrogation of responsibility (Kaye, 2012⁷³) to assist vulnerable groups and communities to manage the impacts of austerity. As Kaye (2012: no page number) remarks, in an era of public spending austerity, ‘building resilience risks ending up looking like a convenient, cheap substitute for delivering the services local taxpayers expect.’

In response to these recessionary forces or stressors, local authorities across England have adopted a range of approaches and practical measures to support the socio-economic resilience of their communities, particularly those deemed to be the most vulnerable or at risk. First, it should be stated that the concept of community resilience (a term that frequently appears in local authority literature) is often used interchangeably with the term neighbourhood resilience, no doubt because the spatial focus of local government action is usually at the neighbourhood scale or equivalent spatial units, such as electoral wards, localities or geographical places defined as deprived, vulnerable or low-income communities etc.

It is important to note that outside the realm of emergency and disaster planning, resilience in a socio-economic context is still an emerging approach within the local authority sector. To date few local authorities have developed comprehensive corporate resilience strategies or embedded the concept within their policy processes. In addition, other concepts inform local government approaches to addressing contemporary socio-economic challenges such as community cohesion and empowerment, asset based approaches, coproduction and the development of social capital. As a consequence of local government recently acquiring control of local public health policy, resilience is also emerging as a critical component in local authorities’ efforts to tackle entrenched health inequalities (I&DEA, 2010⁷⁴).

While there is undoubtedly an element of truth in the assertion that resilience has become the latest ‘buzzword’⁷⁵ or ‘pervasive idiom’⁷⁶ in policy-making circles, at the heart of local government’s understanding of resilience is a perception that communities can be protected and ultimately transformed by political and policy action, particularly in the sense of supporting primarily vulnerable communities to become resilient ones. This conceptualisation of resilience has informed the thinking and actions of local authorities in various ways. For instance, some local authorities have used the term as a simple rhetorical statement or guiding principle, usually in the sense that their aspirational

⁷³ Kaye, A. (2012) *Building resilient communities: an obvious way to cope with budget cuts or an abrogation of councils’ responsibility?* Available at: <http://www.opm.co.uk/blog/building-resilient-communities-an-obvious-way-to-cope-with-budget-cuts-or-an-abrogation-of-councils-responsibility/>. Accessed on: 26/03/14.

⁷⁴ I&DEA (2010) *A glass half-full: how an asset approach can improve community health and well-being*. Available at: http://www.local.gov.uk/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=bf034d2e-7d61-4fac-b37e-f39dc3e2f1f2&groupId=10180. Accessed on: 11/03/14.

⁷⁵ Shaw, K. and Maythorne, L. (2011) *Local Resilience and Climate Change: a study of the North East of England*. Available at: <http://www.northumbria.ac.uk/static/5007/sasspdf/resilience.pdf>. Accessed on: 25/03/14.

⁷⁶ Cooper, M. and Walker, J. (2011) Genealogies of Resilience: From Systems Ecology to the Political Economy of Crisis Adaptation. *Security Dialogue*, 41(2).

strategic objective is to build resilient communities that are better able to cope with and withstand current and future socio-economic challenges. Used in this largely metaphorical sense, resilience is viewed as an outcome or end goal of public policy.

In other cases, local authorities have developed a range of analytical tools and policy measures. These include local/regional intelligence units or observatories to comprehensively map the local spatial impacts of the recession and austerity measures,⁷⁷ particularly in relation to the effects of the implementation of the Government's welfare reform legislation (e.g. bedroom tax, Universal Credit and Benefits Cap). Some Councils have developed local initiatives to mitigate the impacts of welfare reforms.⁷⁸ In addition, there are examples of local authorities that have established administrative and governance mechanisms such as working groups or internal reporting procedures (e.g. regular reports to Cabinet or senior leaders) to develop, co-ordinate and monitor policy measures designed to support resilience action.

Finally, examples of local authorities adopting a strategic policy framework based on a resilience conceptual approach are rare. Newham Borough in Greater London and Sunderland City Council have developed resilience strategies as a core component of their long-term approach to managing the local impacts of welfare reform. However, to date, it is questionable whether such comprehensive resilience approaches have or will engender the hoped for transformative changes that will significantly strengthen the resilience of communities in the face of significant and ongoing socio-economic stress resulting from public expenditure austerity and other external forces.

⁷⁷ Winters, L., McAteer, S. and Scott-Samuel, A. (2012). *Assessing the Impact of the Economic Downturn on Health and Wellbeing*. Available at: http://healthycities.org.uk/uploads/files/assessingtheimpactoftheeconomic_downturnonhealt.pdf. Accessed on: 11/03/14.

⁷⁸ Often this is undertaken in collaboration with local authorities' local partners such as CCG's, social housing providers, CAB's and credit unions etc.