

## **Public Sector Restructuring and Blue Light Services: Resilience, Resistance, Governance and Critical Local Infrastructure**

**Supervisors: Dr Julian Clark and Prof. John R. Bryson**

### **Abstract**

Through its *Localism Bill*, the Coalition Government has embarked on a radical process of public sector restructuring that will transform the relationship between national and local government. This research project explores public sector restructuring of 'blue light services' and its impact on effectiveness and responsiveness. These services' are critical local infrastructures that contribute to local resilience and community well-being. The project will explore the effects of restructuring in two English counties: Worcestershire and Herefordshire. Both counties have experienced extreme flooding and cold weather events and both are trying to respond to the challenges of restructuring public services without compromising service delivery and effectiveness. Central to this approach is their development of new forms of governance and a focus on leaner delivery mechanisms. The project will explore three dimensions of this restructuring intended to enhance resilience at the county and regional levels. First, how 'blue light service' provision is changing in response to new political-administrative practices and procedures, such as shared services and regional coordination of emergency services provision. Second, how voluntarism and private sector involvement might enhance resilience to future extreme events in both counties, and the extent to which risk of these events is a collective or individual responsibility. Third, how locally defined 'lock-ins' and path dependencies are resisting the restructuring agenda in both counties.

\*\*\*\*

Through its *Localism Bill*, the Coalition Government has embarked on a radical process of public sector restructuring that will transform the relationship between national and local government. Currently this takes two forms. First is greater emphasis on voluntarism (through the 'Big Society' agenda), with the aim of altering the relationship between individuals, social enterprises and society. The expectation is that citizens should be supplementing or even replacing services currently provided by the state. Second, public sector restructuring is also being driven by a top-down emphasis on budgetary control, with substantial cuts in Local Authority grants and greater reliance on outsourcing service provision to the private sector. At the same time, societal and environmental challenges are altering demand for public services. An ageing population is set to place additional pressures on the public sector. This is complicated by climate change and, specifically, the increased incidence of extreme weather events, including flooding, heat waves, and intense cold. Local or regional resilience to these extreme events is, in part, determined by the ability of the 'blue light' services (fire and rescue, police, ambulance) to respond to the unexpected (or the expected unexpected). This capacity to respond is certain to be affected by rapid, on-going public sector restructuring.

This research project will explore public sector restructuring of 'blue light services' and its impact on effectiveness and responsiveness. These services' are critical local infrastructures that contribute to local resilience and community well-being. The project will explore the effects of restructuring in two English counties: Worcestershire and Herefordshire. Both counties have experienced extreme flooding and cold weather events and both are trying to respond to the

challenges of restructuring public services without compromising service delivery and effectiveness. Central to this approach is their development of new forms of governance and a focus on leaner delivery mechanisms. The project will explore three dimensions of this restructuring intended to enhance resilience at the county and regional levels:

1. how 'blue light service' provision is changing in response to new political-administrative practices and procedures, such as shared services and regional coordination of emergency services provision;
2. how voluntarism and private sector involvement might enhance resilience to future extreme events in both counties, and the extent to which risk of these events is a collective or individual responsibility;
3. how locally defined 'lock-ins' and path dependencies are resisting the restructuring agenda in both counties.

For further details contact details: Dr Julian Clark, Email [j.r.a.clark@bham.ac.uk](mailto:j.r.a.clark@bham.ac.uk) +44 (0)121 414 6262, Professor John Bryson, e-mail: [J.R.Bryson@bham.ac.uk](mailto:J.R.Bryson@bham.ac.uk); tel: +44 (0)121 414 5549 or Gretchel Coldicott (0121 414 6935, email: [g.coldicott@bham.ac.uk](mailto:g.coldicott@bham.ac.uk)).