

Resilience

A guide to delivering a resilience review



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For us, resilient places are those which have the ability to respond to opportunities, be capable of change and bounce back from any negative events. More than anything this requires collaboration and strong partnerships within and between communities, local authorities and other public agencies, and local businesses.

Introduction

We all want to live and work in exciting, attractive towns, villages and cities. The economic recession has impacted significantly though and the rise of out of town retail parks, the internet and generally more demanding, discerning shoppers has left our high streets vulnerable. However our towns are still vitally important, and their future are as a focus for local communities, trade, transport, leisure and town centre living.

It is important to develop an understanding of how our towns operate so that we can fully respond to the challenges and opportunities they face. In order to do this there is a need to undertake some research, which determines the effectiveness of collaboration and partnership working across the local area and what the outcomes of this is for local people and organisations. This forms the basis of a resilience review, and this short guide will take you through it step by step.

What is resilience?

Over the last six years, the Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) has developed a research programme exploring the resilience of places, including towns. For us, resilient places are those which have the ability to respond to opportunities, be capable of change and bounce back from any negative events like the recession and the flat-lining economy we have recently experienced. More than anything this requires collaboration and strong partnerships within and between communities (the social sector), local authorities and other public agencies (public sector), and local businesses (the commercial sector).

Our thinking around resilience started with an understanding that in the UK we need to change the way we think about the economy. After considerable research, a number of pilot studies were undertaken and CLES developed a model for assessing resilience. We have now tested

this model successfully across a wide range of locations in the UK and internationally. Within the last year it has been implemented in a wide range of towns. It has also been used in numerous neighbourhoods, and cities.

The resilience model provides a fresh and innovative way of helping places to move forward positively. The economy has changed and this means we need a

new way of thinking about creating successful places.

This is not about more money, more interventions, and more bureaucracy; instead we argue

for more fundamental practical,

local solutions that are based on collaboration and relationships.

Resilience in town centres

What needs to be done?

CLES believes that the approach to towns has, up to now, often placed too much attention on planned, 'shiny', schemes and developments. Often less attention has been given to the interests of local communities and smaller independent enterprises which are central to the success of towns and provide the unique character of places. That is not to say that both large retail and property companies should be overlooked – they can and should be powerful partners. However, we believe that a new approach to town management, based on stronger networks within and between the public, commercial and social sectors, is needed.

We want to help restore 'balance' to the high street. Creating strong partnerships between communities, local businesses and the local public sector is an important step in taking control of your area, building a vibrant creative community

that in turn breathes new creative life back into our towns.

A new approach

Our approach is to provide a review of how a town economy works by gathering and analysing a range of information. This includes looking through local plans and policies, and having conversations with partners who have a stake in the town.

We believe that a new approach to town management, based on stronger networks within and between the public, commercial and social sectors, is needed.

The level of resilience is judged by analysing information about a place across ten resilience measures. These measures, listed below, relate to the different types of relationship that exist within the town, and how these relationships help build the resilience of towns.

The commercial, public and social sectors

- **Measure 1 - The commercial economy-** The commercial economy is businesses that are privately owned and profit motivated.
- **Measure 2 - The public economy -** The public economy consists of services delivered on behalf of government organisations whether national, regional or local, and funded by the public purse.
- **Measure 3 - The social economy -** The social economy includes a wide range of community, voluntary and not-for-profit activities that try to bring about positive local change.

Cross sector relationships within the town

- **Measure 4 – Relationship between the commercial and public economies-** Looks at the attitudes and actions of the commercial sector to the public sector and vice versa. It explores the effectiveness of partnerships between the two sectors.
- **Measure 5 – Relationship between the public and social sectors-** Looks at how the public and social sectors interact, and the strengths of the relationships that exist. This particularly explores how the social sector interacts with the public sector, and how much influence they have in the town.
- **Measure 6 – Relationship between the social and commercial economies-** Explores how the social sector works together with the commercial sector. This involves looking at how engaged the commercial sector is with the local community, as well as other things, such as funding, assisting voluntary and community organisations, volunteering programmes or working together to make local improvements.

External factors

- **Measure 7 – Health and wellbeing and the relationship to the town-** Examines how local health and wellbeing issues relate to the town's economy. This includes ill health, quality of life and leisure patterns.
- **Measure 8 – Relationship between the town and working within environmental limits-** Explores to what extent town plans and developments consider the local environment. This includes the amount of green space, the quality of the local built environment, and how local plans and policies consider environmental impacts.

- **Measure 9 – Relationship between the town and local identity, history and context-** This assesses the extent to which identity, history and culture shape a town and its economy.
- **Measure 10 – Governance-** Looks at how policy has affected the town, and understanding how the various levels of government encourage or restrict the development of a resilient economy.

UNDERTAKING THE RESILIENCE REVIEW

This short guide takes you through step by step how to complete a resilience review for your town centre.

Town teams have to understand their area, the people who use the town centres, the challenges and opportunities that they face, and importantly, how closely the key partners within and across the public, commercial and social sectors are working together to make resilient towns.

This short guide below takes you through step by step to complete a resilience review for your town centre. The approach includes three key stages:

- 1) Collecting information from a range of documents;
- 2) Speaking with partners who have an interest in the town from the across the public, commercial and social sectors;
- 3) Using the information from the first two stages to judge the level of resilience for the town.

Stage 1: collecting information

This stage includes looking through a range of local plans, policies and data relating to the town centre. It uncovers the issues that close partnership working will aim to address.

Begin by looking through a range of local plans and policies relating to your town centre. Your local authority will have access to documents and information – many of these will be online, and Town Centre Managers, planning officers

and economic development officers are important starting points for getting the information you need.

Some examples of the documents you may find include the town centre strategy, local and neighbourhood plans, community strategies and action plans. You can also use local data from surveys provided, for example, by companies like Experian or Springboard. As part of the Town Team Support Programme, ATCM can provide some regional data for you on request. Information on things such as employment and key business sectors is available from the Office for National Statistics (and the local authority will have access to this).

You will need to consider a number of things when reviewing the documents:

a) What are the main challenges for the local area?

This can include:

- High levels of unemployment;
- Lack of diversity in the economy;
- Local skill levels;
- Specific problems for local retailers and vacant units;
- Issues in the housing market;
- Local transport links and general accessibility.

b) What are your opportunities? What do the documents and supporting information suggest as things that can be built upon? For example:

- New employment opportunities, training and investment;
- Public realm improvements and key developments (housing, business, new parks)

c) What have local partners done, or planned to do, to address the above? This could be in the form of action plans or master-plans.

Once you have done this 'desktop study', you will have set the scene for your local area and also understand who some of the key local partners are.

Stage 2: talking to local partners

Town Teams are ideally placed for the second stage – talking to local people who have a significant interest and stake in your town. There should be a mix of backgrounds here, including business owners, local authority officers and community groups.

Understand whether everyone is pulling in the same direction; do they all share a common 'vision' for the future?

This is an important part of the review as it provides a deeper understanding of how well the key people and organisations in the town are ready and able to deal with the challenges they face now and in the future. It is important during this stage to aim to understand whether everyone is pulling in the same direction; do they all share a common 'vision' for the future? The more effectively everyone collaborates, the more resilient your local area is and will be able to adapt

to change. There are a number of overarching points to be thinking about during these discussions such as:

- Is there evidence of a common 'vision' for your area? Is this shared across all sectors?
- Are the sectors joined up and are there networks within the local area that deliver positive results?
- Do local businesses and community groups, work together to help deliver common goals, such as public realm improvements, increasing employment for local communities, marketing, events or promotions?
- Do community groups get enough exposure in your local area? Are they using the town centres to deliver services and activities, and hold meetings?
- Do local colleges or universities work with partners and offer placements or support for the town centre through their students? Where relevant do local businesses and community groups engage with student populations?
- Have local businesses come together to support each other and decide how best to improve trade and attract more people? Is the local area marketed well, or is this done by lots of competing, individual 'voices'?

Which partners do we speak with?

The first task is identifying who to talk to. The local authority should have existing lists of contacts, and can help in setting up meetings, and from Stage One, there will have been a number of organisations that will have been noted. Those on the list will need to be active in the town centre, and you should split your discussions into three broad groups:

- **Public sector:** economic development & business support officers, town centre manager, planners, and colleges/universities where they are within or close to the town centre.
- **Commercial sector:** Chamber of Commerce and Federation of Small Businesses, trader groups, large local employers, shopping centre managers, key independent businesses.
- **Social sector:** local housing association, voluntary and community groups.

Consulting with partners

Once the contacts are identified and the meetings set up, the next step is undertaking the consultation. These can be done as one-on-one interviews or as discussion groups with several people – for example when there is a network of businesses or if time to undertake the consultation is limited then it can be more practical to undertake a group discussion. Generally however individual interviews provide greater insight. This process does not have to be overly formal – these discussions can be undertaken in any setting.

The consultation will give you a sense of the level and effectiveness of collaboration within and between the public, social and commercial sectors. A number of questions frequently asked to provide the basis for discussion are provided in Appendix 1. These are suggestions and the key message is to understand the level of communication between the groups listed above, to see where, if at all, collaboration is happening, and what the outcomes of the collaboration are in terms of making a positive difference to the local area.

If you have the resources, short surveys with other local businesses can help broaden your data. Similarly short surveys with members of the public passing through the town centre can

help identify in more detail what people want from it and how they use it. These can be simple, paper-based exercises (which could be conducted by local students for instance), or run online through a free tool such as Survey Monkey (www.surveymonkey.com).

At the end of stage two, you should have a good understanding of what the threats and opportunities to your local area are, and what cross sector partners think about how they are being addressed. All of this helps you to review where your town is heading and how well positioned it is to adapt to change.

Stage 3: how resilient is your local area?

Stages 1 and 2 will have provided a lot of information about the town and you can now use this to make a judgement on how resilient your local area is. There are four different scales for each measure which range from 'resilient' to 'brittle'. Judgements based on the information you have collected should be made for each of the measures, based on the following criteria:

4 = Resilient, where there is a lot of evidence of very strong relationships across the town, both within and between the public, community and private sectors. The three sectors are working together very effectively, have been for some time and this is resulting in positive things happening in the town. There are clear and very positive relationships between the local area and the external factors (measures 7-10) – for example, health and wellbeing levels are high, the local environment is a key priority, and identity, history and culture is positively embedded into the town.

3 = Stable, where there is some evidence of good relationships across the town, both within and between the public, community and private sectors. There is some evidence that the sectors are working

together well and examples of where the sectors have come together to develop local responses to challenges. However there is still more to do in terms of collaboration if the town is to become resilient. There are good and positive relationships between the area and the external factors (measures 7-10).

2 = Vulnerable, where relationships within and between the public, community and private sectors are not very well developed. Whilst there may be some communication and working together, it tends to be piecemeal and so positive results for the town centre and local community are limited. Without more collaboration to make things better, the local economy will be vulnerable. There are poor relationships between the area and the external factors (measures 7-10).

1 = Brittle, where there is very little evidence of relationships between the public, community and private sectors, and where there are relationships there are a lot of tensions. The sectors are not working together to respond to challenges and opportunities. There are very poor relationships between the area and the external factors (measures 7-10) – for example, health issues are acute and history, identity and culture is not embedded into the town at all.

If the local area is strong and resilient, there will be several 4's and 3's. If it is vulnerable and brittle then there will be mainly 1's and 2's. This will

allow you to understand where you can focus the Town Team, local authority and community/business groups' attention – on building on strengths and/or addressing key challenges.

Based on your judgements on each of the measures as to the resilience of the town, the final step is producing an overall resilience assessment based on all of the evidence. An example is provided in the diagram below.

Following on from the resilience diagnostic

After the diagnostic, you will have an understanding of how resilient your town is, and this provides the platform then to start addressing the concerns, challenges and opportunities that came to light.

This may involve a number of things. It could mean thinking at a broader level of how the town should be used in the future, and creating a new shared vision – perhaps making it less about shops and more about social, cultural and community uses that naturally draw people in. It may be that this provides the foundation for a wider partnership of people connecting with each other to deliver real change in the area, led by a diverse range of people. The Town Team could lead this.

Other things could include the development of business forums and also thinking about how the public sector spends locally (the more local businesses that supply the each other and your local



authority, the more money that remains in your local economy and town centre). There may also be a need to consider how community groups involve themselves in the town centre more in future, and what this means for the relationships with the commercial sector, in addition to considering services delivered by the local authority for your high street.

And what about 'quick wins'? What could be put in place relatively easily that could potentially make a marked difference? Some examples are outlined below.

- Events can raise awareness of local businesses, social groups, and cultural events bring you together as a community.
- Promotional activity can attract more local people, and perhaps even other business types you may be missing to complete your high street offer.
- A market can be the social hub of a town and help connect local traders with local people. Your ATCM Advisor can help guide you here.
- Community markets: local markets can be the social hub of a town. It makes practical sense for community groups to have a role here too, taking advantage of vacant units that have affected markets across the country.
- Take advantage of social media – ATCM has a social media guide to help you understand the benefits of Facebook, Twitter and 'going online' with a free to start website. Public/commercial/social collaboration here can help fully promote the brand of the town.
- Would a greener town centre attract more people and help set you apart from other offers in your region? Urban gardening and using local community groups to run 'grow your own' activities could help achieve this.

- Capitalising on historical assets and heritage of the area is important. Many towns have listed buildings and other assets which are important for their heritage and identity. Building on this and through the development of things such as heritage trails would attract visitors and would increase footfall. There may be other distinctive assets that your town can further use and promote.

This is by no means an exhaustive list but provides a flavour of some of the things that towns can be thinking about to become more resilient.

What Next?

The ATCM is using Government funding to support Town Teams and Portas Pilots across England. Our website, www.atcm.org, is a great starting point for information on free workshops, online guidance and downloadable resources to help you on your way.

You will also hopefully know your Regional Advisor and they are a great source of expertise and can point you in the right direction for more bespoke support.

APPENDIX 1

Sample of interview questions

Suggested questions for stage 2

Below is a sample of some questions that are commonly used in our resilience interviews. These are not set in stone; rather they are aimed at getting the discussion going.

General town centre questions

- What do you think are the main challenges and opportunities for the town centre in both the short and long term future?
- Would a clear direction or vision for the local area be of use?
- Is there a clear and coherent direction/vision for the local area?
- Would a clear direction or vision for the local area be of use?

Commercial sector questions (measure 1)

- What do you perceive to be the strengths and challenges of the private sector?
- Is it well joined up – are there local networks?
- Is it diverse or is the main focus just retail, or one specific type of retail? What's missing?
- Does the private sector have a single voice on big issues in our local area?

Public sector questions (measure 2)

- What are the strengths and challenges of the public sector within the town in terms of

investment, procurement and employment?

- How do you intend to implement local town centre plans (if one exists)?
- What blockers/drivers are associated with them?
- Is existing economic activity in and around the town centre a sustainable form of local employment?

Social sector questions (measure 3)

- What do you perceive to be the strengths and challenges of the social sector?
- Does the social sector have a say in local planning and development?
- Is the sector in the area joined up? Are there any local networks?
- Are there strong social bonds in and around the town? Are there active local resident groups?

Relationship between the public and commercial sectors (measure 4)

- Does the public sector support private sector activity?
- How has the public sector managed the environment to make the town centre an attractive place to do business?
- Is there a town centre partnership/manager? How effective is it and what have been the outcomes as a result?

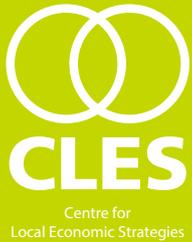
- Is the private sector too dependent on the public sector for making improvements to business conditions in and around the town? Or is it very involved? What scope is there for the private sector to take on more?

Relationship between the public and social sectors (measure 5)

- How well does the public sector support social sector activity?
- Is the social sector involved in any local improvements – e.g. arts/culture, local environment?
- Is there support for local residents through working with social enterprises and community groups (e.g. employment and training for residents)?

Relationship between the social and commercial sectors (measure 6)

- How do you view the relationship between the social and commercial economy? (evidence of Corporate Social Responsibility for example);
- How has the social sector attempted to connect with local business?
- Are there many events evident? Do you see much cross over between the private and social sectors as part of these events?
- As a business, would you be interested in increasing levels of engagement with the social sector? Do you know how the different ways of how to go about it?
- Are you already engaged with the social sector? If so how are you doing this and why?



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