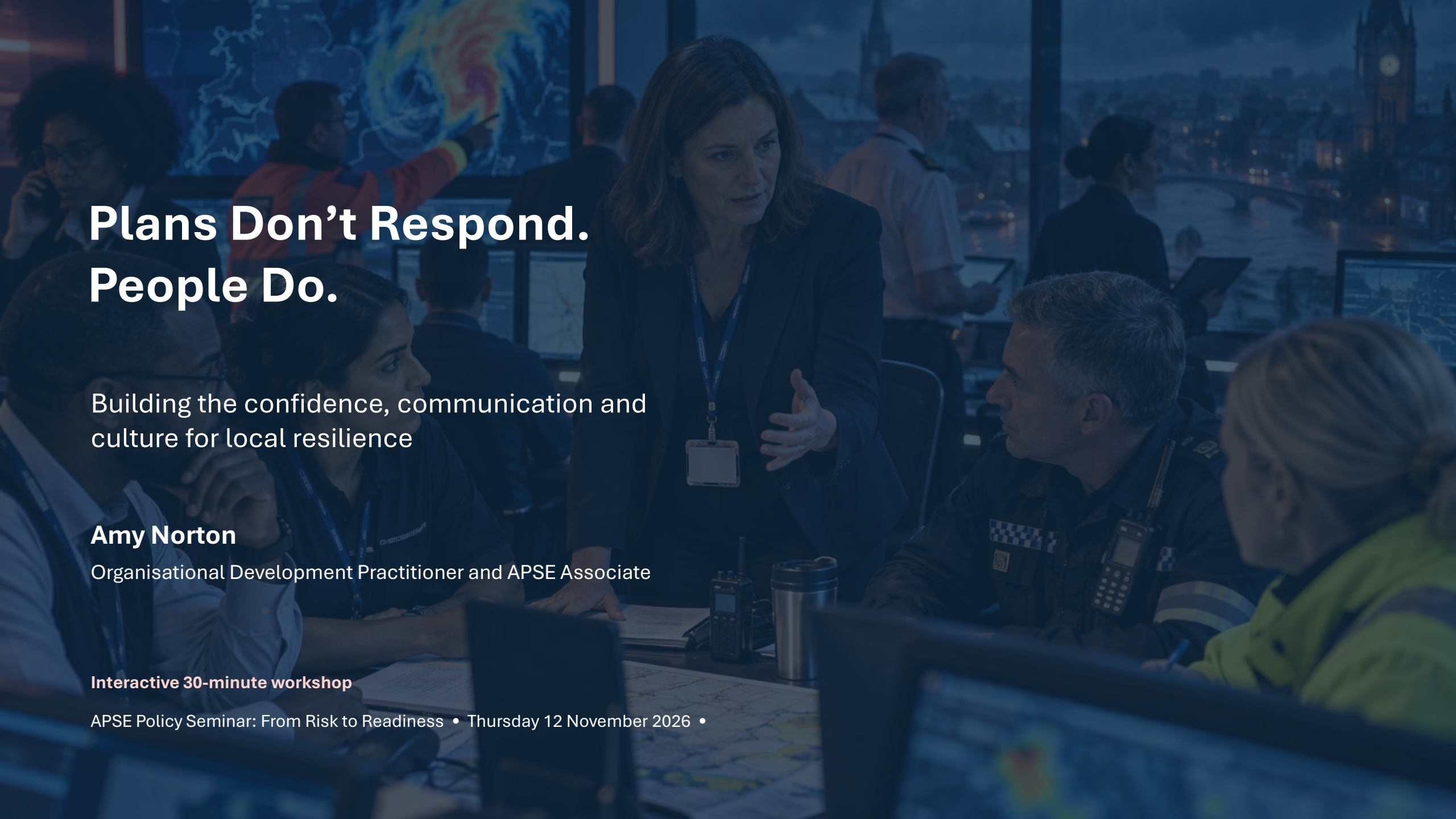


Plans Don’t Respond. People Do.

Building the confidence, communication and culture for local resilience

Amy Norton

Organisational Development Practitioner and APSE Associate

Interactive 30-minute workshop

APSE Policy Seminar: From Risk to Readiness • Thursday 12 November 2026 •

A plan is not the same as being ready.

IF SOMETHING HAPPENED TOMORROW…

How confident are you that people across your council would know what to do?

not simply where the emergency plan is?

QUICK SHOW OF HANDS

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The checklist trap

Compliance matters. But a completed checklist does not guarantee a capable response from council teams.

A PLAN

tells people what should happen

≠

READINESS

determines what actually happens

Leadership → People → Communication → Culture → Practice → Readiness

Where will your chain break?

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DIFFERENT RISK. SAME PEOPLE CHALLENGE.

Martyn's Law • Flooding • Wildfires • Major incidents

Plans, procedures and statutory duties are essential.

But when pressure rises, response depends on people making decisions, communicating, escalating and adapting.

Martyn's Law: who decides to evacuate, invacuate or lock down?

Flooding: who tells frontline staff and residents what has changed?

Wildfire: who escalates when conditions outpace the plan?



Your scenario

Work in small groups. Don’t solve the emergency. Diagnose the people challenge.

It’s 2:15pm on a Friday.

A serious incident begins affecting a public-facing council service. Information is incomplete, pressure is increasing and staff are looking to managers for direction.

CHOOSE YOUR GROUP’S TRIGGER

A • MARTYN’S LAW

A suspicious item is reported at a busy council-run venue during an event. Staff are unsure who can order a lockdown or evacuation.

B • FLOODING

Rivers are rising and roads are closing. A council leisure centre may need to open as a rest centre, but staff are hearing updates from social media first.

C • WILDFIRE

A moorland fire is spreading towards homes. Council teams, the fire service and partners are each working from different information.

WHAT STARTS TO GO WRONG BECAUSE OF PEOPLE?

3 minutes • Pick one trigger • Capture the first things that come to mind

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Five questions that move us from plan to readiness

Confidence, communication, culture: compare these with what your group captured.

01	Do our people know their role?	CONFIDENCE
02	Are managers confident enough to lead under pressure?	CONFIDENCE
03	Can information move quickly through the organisation?	COMMUNICATION
04	Is it safe to challenge and escalate concerns?	CULTURE
05	Have we practised, learned and adapted?	CULTURE

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Compliance asks one question. Readiness asks another.

COMPLIANCE ASKS

“Do we have the arrangements in place?”

READINESS ASKS

“Could our people actually make them work?”

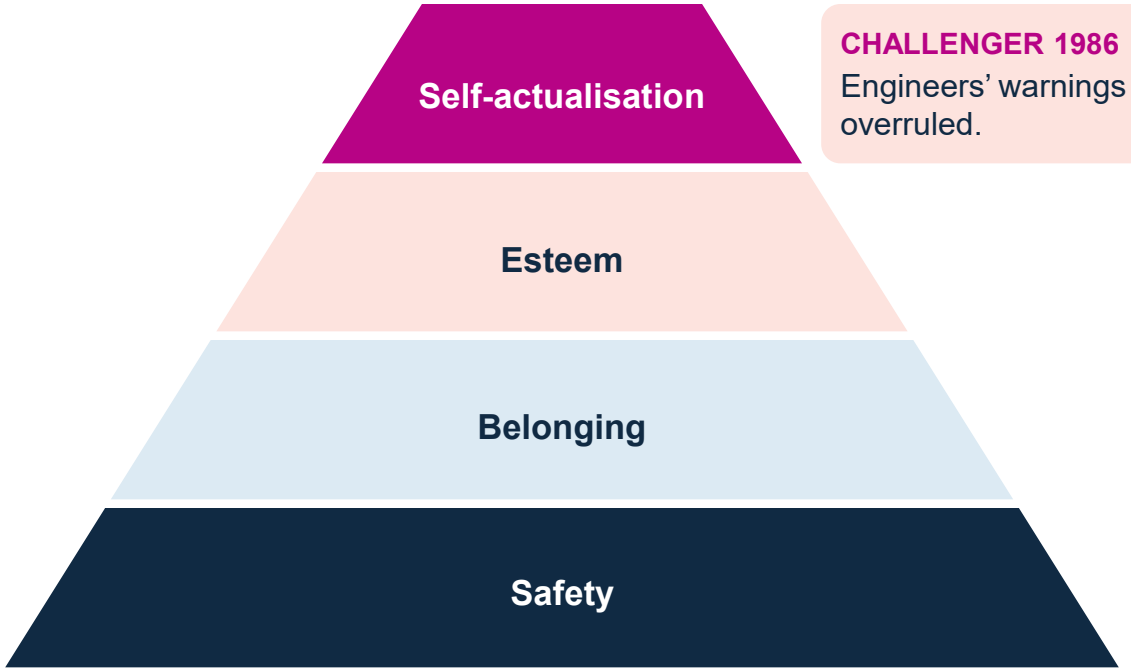
We need both.

Today’s sessions on Martyn’s Law, leadership and community reassurance all rely on it.

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Culture is the foundation beneath it all

If people don’t know and respect their leaders and managers, they won’t perform when it matters most.



CHALLENGER 1986
Engineers’ warnings overruled.

I’m trusted to use my judgement.
Martyn’s Law: a steward raises the alarm, or challenges a decision that feels wrong.

I respect my leaders and I’m respected.
Flooding: frontline staff trust their manager’s update over what they see on social media.

My manager knows me, and I know them.
Wildfire: managers know their people’s skills, local knowledge and home situations, so they ask the right person.

I know my role and feel safe to act.
Major incident: staff know their role and know they’ll be backed if they make a call in good faith.

THE FOUNDATION UNDER EVERY SLIDE

DRIVE
Leaders who go first

CULTURE
Safe to challenge and escalate

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT
Practise, learn, adapt

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ONE LAST QUESTION

If an incident happened tomorrow…

what is the ONE people-related weakness in your council that could undermine your response?

Write it down. • Share it with the person next to you. • Decide what you can influence.

COMPLIANCE ASKS

“Do we have the arrangements in place?”

READINESS ASKS

“Could our people actually make them work?”

We need both.

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RESILIENCE ISN'T TESTED WHEN WE WRITE THE PLAN.

IT'S TESTED WHEN PEOPLE HAVE TO DELIVER IT.

Your takeaway: use the one people-related weakness you can influence and the first action you will take today.

