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This article, 'Mann for a crisis' written by Lynda King Taylor, appeared in the July '06 edition of Public Servant – The Publication for Today's Public Service Leaders.

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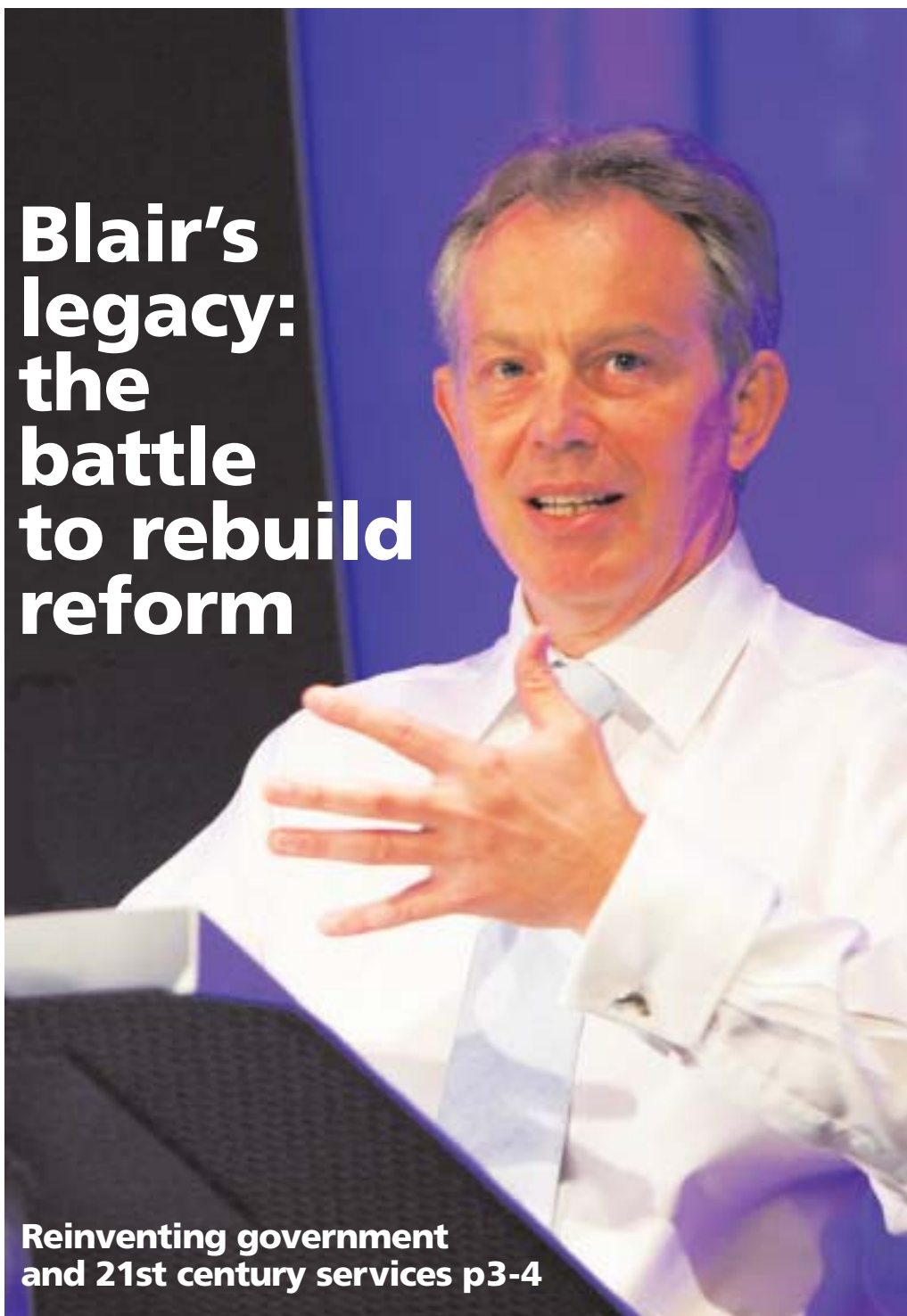
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Mann for a crisis

It has been a tough time in Whitehall with accusations of institutional complacency and a low accountability. As the head of the Civil Contingencies Secretariat, Bruce Mann plans for all manner of disasters and security crises. There is no hiding from his responsibilities and he talks to **Lynda King Taylor**



In a year that has seen mainland terrorism, the Buncefield fire involving the UK's fifth largest oil distribution depot and global secondary impacts, there is no doubting the head of the Civil Contingencies Secretariat (CCS) has a tough job on his hands.

Bruce Mann's aim is to improve the UK's resilience, which he simply states is "our ability to absorb and then bounce back from major emergency". He says: "If the impact of emergencies is reduced, that's how we know we are succeeding."

He admits the UK has had much to learn from historically poor risk assessment, resilience planning and business continuity management. While he acknowledges we have progressed from the foot and mouth disasters to make our approach to avian flu and other possible pandemics more effective, there is much more to be done.

Mann is straight to the point: "I know what my challenges are. I don't lie awake at night worrying about them. The biggest challenge is the flu pandemic, no question of that. It is a global threat. So we're putting a lot of time and energy into wherever pandemic flu would emerge, globally." What is a worst case scenario for calculat-

ing UK risk? "Up to 15 million people infected over a period of three months" are his headline figures from which our capability is worked out.

Looking back to 2000 – before the secretariat was created and before Mann's appointment in 2004 – there were too few people alert to potential crises, too many plans left on dusty shelves and not enough honesty at recognising weaknesses when events threatened UK welfare.

"We look for trouble, look out for the crisis. Be honest and rigorous. I will always use those words because that's what we didn't do with foot and mouth," he says. "You must have plans that are tested, evaluated and exercised, and make sure they are as good as they are going to be." He is adamant about the need to better visualise the risk and resilience scenario, then work out the capabilities. That's what CCS calls planning assumptions.

Parliament's Defence Committee reported in 2002 that there was inadequate central direction and coordination to deal with a major disaster such as 9/11. Mann believes this is being addressed especially in the aftermath of the London bombings of 7 July, and the recent release of the 7/7 Parliamentary and London Assembly reports.

Perhaps it remains the case that system deficiencies are only exposed when the worst happens? Mann accepts civil contingencies have learned from the millennium emergencies - whether foot and mouth, flooding or fuel fallibilities. He appreciates that for the UK, as with the US and Hurricane Katrina, any one incident might have exposed serious deficiencies: "Plans were on the shelf and hadn't been revised to cope. The defects were there and the basics weren't. Secondly, it exposes serious deficiencies in process coordination or command and control. What this country had in 2001 was three crises in quick succession...we were not as good as we should be about coordinating across the whole country, and that this isn't just a local authorities' thing any more.

"You can't just leave this to the open market, local authorities, police and a whole range of local respondents. It requires coordination at a high level. We were not as well prepared, or as good at crisis coordination as we ought to be for a national or regional level incident."

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In a sense there has been a vacuum, although in the nuclear area for example there is a very defined process through to local authorities. "In the late 1990s there was no systematic, overarching process in central government to connect," he says. "That is what we have reversed over the last two to three years. We are doing a lot of policy working and thinking at central government in conjunction with local authorities. This will cascade to local respondents saying this seems to work, for example evacuation and health. In those areas we are playing catch-up."

Given all the above, does Mann see himself as the UK equivalent of America's head of homeland security? "Absolutely not. The Department for Homeland Security goes an awful lot wider than we do. It includes immigration, border control, transport, security, coastguard, as well as federal emergency planning. We still have the responsibility for emergencies - they essentially do the response. They don't do the prior planning as we do, so there is no exact American equivalent of the CCS."

When you appreciate UK business continuity planning assumptions, there is much on his plate. There is loss of staff, facilities and access denied to main premises for many months from such incidents as a terrorist attack; loss of mains electricity or water supply for up to three days locally or a significant disruption to fuel supply and transport for up to 10 days.

Mann is energised by changes that have emerged from the experiences of recent years. There are many more detailed arrangements for responding to an emergency or disruptive challenge requiring coordinated UK central government action.



Today 95 per cent of responses are local. Centrally we offer support but the best response starts at giving local responsibility



Government is moving ahead in working with the private sector on complex security and emergency planning. Also the UK is now achieving a more coherent chain of command to respond to disasters, emergencies and attacks.

"Today 95 per cent of responses are local," he says. "Of course, centrally we offer support but the best response starts at giving local responsibility."

Local authorities are progressing under the Civil Contingencies Act (CCA). They may provide generic advice and assistance to businesses and voluntary organisations on business continuity management (BCM).

"It's pretty good what they have done tapping into resources to improve resilience," he says.

"I watch what local authorities are doing. We've come a long way particularly in the last year, and have learned if you do business continuity properly you must do that at a national and local level. We must work with the local experts and we have a duty to do so inside the CCA. This has just come

into effect and we're already seeing good councils working with their local communities."

On his desk I notice a business continuity booklet from Coventry Council, published as a result of the CCA. "They were one of the quickest off the mark and all credit to them," says Mann.

Coventry's leaflet is concise and clear in an area where consultants have often erred in making BCM a science in confusion and complexity.

Mann looks forward to national standards becoming a way of life, building lessons learned into an accreditation mechanism as corporate governance and a mark of brand reputation. A set of draft standards goes out for consultation in the next few weeks.

"Every time I go to a conference," he says, "I find a bit of complacency, a bit of 'we've survived in the past', a lack of understanding or a bit of 'we don't know what to do, so can you help?' We at CCS are trying to help." Wish him well - he deserves a good night's sleep.