National Audit Office

The UK's independent public spending watchdog

Switchboard +44 (0)207 798 7000
Direct Line +44 (0)207 798
Email FOI@nao.org.uk

Reference FOI-1915
Date 20 April 2026

## NAO WORK ON NATIONAL RESILIENCE AND RISK PRIORITIES

Thank you for your request of 23 March 2026 for information held by the National Audit Office. To summarise, in your request you refer to National Audit Office report, The UK's resilience to severe space weather - Summary published on 20 March 2026. You have asked for information in relation to our studies, reviews, scoping exercises, briefing papers, and other projects considered since 01 January 2024 concerning UK national resilience, civil contingencies, national security risks, or emergency preparedness.

We have considered your request in accordance with the Freedom of Information Request Act 2000, and I can confirm that we hold information that falls within the scope of your request. The FOIA provides a legal right of access to recorded information held by a public authority, but it is subject to certain exemptions that may apply. Whilst we do hold some of the information within the scope of your request, having reviewed it, we consider some of the information you have requested as part of point 6 to be exempt from disclosure under section 33 (Public Audit function) of the FOIA.

Our response to your request is as follows:

**Response to points 1 and 2.**

| Date published / expected publication | a. report title / working title | b. department, agency, or public body concerned | c. date commissioned or opened (date study opened on FF) | d. current status | e. subject matter | f. derived from, or related to the NRSA or NRR |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Summer 2026 | Resilience of the UK food supply chain to disruptions | DEFRA | 09/06/2025 | Work in progress: Resilience of the UK food supply chain to disruptions - NAO work in progress | Food supply | Not directly (risk 40: food supply contamination, is related) |
| 20/03/2026 | The UK's resilience to severe space weather | DSIT<br>Met Office<br>DESNEZ<br>Cabinet Office | 07/04/2025 | Published: The UK's resilience to severe space | Space weather | Yes (risk 47) National Risk Register - 2025 edition |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | weather - NAO report | | |
| 04/06/2025 | Resilience to animal diseases | DEFRA APHA | 29/07/2025 | Published: Resilience to animal diseases - NAO report | Animal diseases | Yes (risk 56)<br><br>National Risk Register - 2025 edition<br><br>Risk is recognised on the Chronic Risk Analysis. Theme: Biosecurity |
| 26/02/2025 | Investigation into how government is addressing antimicrobial resistance | DHSC DEFRA | 13/08/2024 | Published: Investigation into how government is addressing antimicrobial resistance - NAO report | Anti-microbial resistance | Not directly<br><br>Risk is recognised on the Chronic Risk Analysis. Theme: Biosecurity |
| 29/01/2025 | Government cyber resilience | Cabinet Office<br>HM Treasury<br>National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC)<br>Central Digital and Data Office (CDD) | 12/04/2024 | Published: Government cyber resilience – NAO report | Cyber | Not directly<br><br>But risk recognised in National Risk Register 2025 edition, Chapter 4, page 51. |

**Response to point 3.**

Since 1 January 2024 no NAO VFM reports have considered threats arising from any of the five areas mentioned.

**Response to point 4.**

We do not hold any information which falls under this aspect of your request.

**Response to point 5.**

We programme our work across all sectors / departments twice a year with a 12–18-month planning horizon and regularly assess whether the work underway remains timely and relevant. Teams develop audit proposals and a subset of proposals are approved for further scoping and exploratory work by the Comptroller and Auditor General and the Executive Team. Our internal programming round guidance sets out a non-exhaustive framework of issues for NAO staff to consider as teams build on their on-going assessments of risk and opportunity across sectors and / or across government to develop audit proposals (see work programming guidance extracts below). As part of that process, the Financial and Risk Management (FaRM) Insights Team provides guidance for teams to take into account when considering national resilience study proposals (see response to point 6 below).

Commented [PB1]: Expand, also we dont refer to the as hubs externally. Change to 'Financial and Risk Management (FaRM) Insights Team

Alongside the proposals developed through this bottom-up approach, the Comptroller and Auditor General and the Executive Team consider inputs from other NAO teams, including the Financial and Risk Management (FaRM) Insights Team, which provides insights across several thematic areas including resilience.

All our work fits into a single programme balancing a range of priorities that can change depending on e.g. risk assessment findings and government plans / programmes. Decisions on which work proposals to approve for further scoping and exploratory work are made in a workshop style discussion; therefore we do not have a scoring matrix nor a specific set of selection criteria for UK resilience and security issues.

There is no limit on the number of audits on a single topic / issue e.g. UK resilience and security that could be approved in each round. The approval decisions are informed by considering the balance of the programme across the factors set out in the extract from the guidance below. Work that is not approved in one programming round may be approved in the next round or through a monthly approvals process that considers time-pressing audit proposals; equally work that is approved for further scoping may be paused if a more pressing audit issue requires prioritisation.

**Wider perspectives and contacts**

| | Perspectives to consider | People who might be able to help |
|---|---|---|
| External interest | • Parliamentary interest<br>• High-profile issues identified through responsive programme and media<br>• International issues and comparisons | • Parliamentary Relations Team<br>• Response Team, Communications Team<br>• International Team |
| Cross-cutting issues | • Cross-government themes and functional priorities<br>• Relative assessment of risks across government (e.g. across the GMPP)<br>• Fraud, propriety and governance<br>• Sustainability, climate and environment | • Cross-government Team, Hubs<br>• Hubs<br>• Fraud and Propriety Team<br>• Environment and Climate Change Hub |
| Different perspectives | • User perspectives and differential impacts<br>• Financial audit key risks and key audit areas<br>• Related parts of the 'system' e.g. regulators, local government<br>• Good practice examples<br>• Innovative analytical methods and data | • Diversity Assurance Team<br>• Client area FA Team<br>• Relevant client area teams<br>• Cross-government Team, Hubs<br>• Analysis Hub |

**Response to point 6.**

In November 2024 the Financial and Risk Management (FaRM) Insights Team issued internal resilience guidance which was added to our internal work planning guidance. It provided, at a high level, questions for teams to take into account when considering national resilience study proposals.

**NAO work programming guidance (November 2024 – please note this will change with the NAO's strategy):**

Being consistent in how we think about resilience will enable us to understand preparedness for systemic risks better and focus our work on systemic and whole-systems risks, and to recognise the cross-cutting interdependencies and consequences. These are some of the questions we consider:

| | |
|---|---|
| **1** | To what extent are National Risks being factored into your assessments and study proposals? What impact are national risks already having/expected to have on the department? To what extent is the Department impacted by the **chronic risk drivers** (see below)? |
| **2** | To what extent is the department or its ALBs dealing with the known national resilience challenges (see below)? Is it clear that those challenges are being captured and fed into Department-level and national risk assessments? How is the department managing these challenges when they are shared across departmental boundaries? |
| **3** | What other specific risks are there to **departmental** resilience and preparedness? Are they recognised at Board level? Have there been as significant changes to the risk profile over the year? What are the emerging risks impacting the department? |
| **4** | What arrangements are in place or deliberate **steps** are departments taking to build or strengthen resilience (anticipate, assess, prevent, prepare, assure, respond, recover, learn and improve). This might be at organisational level or with delivery bodies and systems (such as local government, partners and other sectors)? |
| **5** | Is it clear what **good** resilience and preparedness looks like for the department and its key systems, connected ALB's/partners, and sectors? |

**Known national resilience themes and whole-system vulnerabilities**

Here are some examples of whole-system resilience challenges the NAO teams need to be aware of when considering risk assessments and future study proposals, many of which have informed previous studies in the work programme:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Critical national infrastructure** (asset maintenance, repair of property and estates) | **Public health** (infectious diseases, pandemics, plant and animal diseases) | **Supply chain** (food, energy, fuel and labour security) |
| **Climate change** (responses to climate related events, adaptation failure) | **Financial management** (economic shocks, inflation, cost of living) | **Cyber** security and information security (mis and dis information) |
| **Service delivery** (operational failures, productivity loss, transformation) | **Workforce planning** (recruitment, retention, leadership, talent / skills) | **Digital and technology** (legacy systems, innovation, AI, data and systems) |

**Chronic risks** (defined as long-term challenges that can erode the economy, community, way of life / national security)

In summer 2024 the Cabinet Office and the Government Office for Science issued the first Chronic Risk Analysis. The analysis sits parallel to the National Security Risk Assessment, and similarly, is an official document. It is a tool for Departments to use to inform long-term policy and investment decisions. The analysis looks at **26 chronic risk drivers**.

| Theme | Chronic risk drivers | |
|---|---|---|
| Security | Changes in the nature of terrorism | changes in the nature of serious and organised crime |
| | Fraud and illicit finance | |
| Technology and cybersecurity | Changes in the nature of cybersecurity threats | Impacts from use of end-to-end encryption |
| | Impacts from reliance on digital platforms and digital service providers for services and interactions | Concentration of risk through dominance of global tech |
| | Impacts from use and capability of artificial intelligence (AI) | |
| Geopolitical | Challenges to international institutions | State threats |
| Environmental | Climate change | Biodiversity loss |
| | Increasing competition for critical minerals | Pollution and environmental degradation |
| Societal | Impacts from demographic change | Disproportionate impacts on vulnerable persons |
| | Disinformation and misinformation | |
| Biosecurity | Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) | Animal disease |
| | Foodborne disease | Plant pests |
| | Impacts from expansion of engineering biology | Impacts from collection and use of biological data |
| Economic | Impacts from reliance of global supply chains | Impacts from emerging financial systems |
| | Skills shortages and mismatches | |

There has been no further internal guidance issued since November 2024.

**Reasons for Using the Section 33 Exemption:**

With regards to this point in terms of briefings/advice provided to the C&AG, we have applied the public audit exemption, section 33 of the FOI Act to this information. It is considered confidential for audit purposes as disclosure could undermine our statutory auditor role. It would discourage audited bodies from cooperating, and lead to more frequent enforcement of statutory access rights, delaying audits and increasing costs. It is important that we maintain a secure environment for candid information sharing which ensures efficient audits and revealing the information you requested would contradict our statutory obligations under Section 17(3) of the Budget Responsibility and National Audit Act 2011. Therefore, the Section 33(2) FOIA public audit exemption is appropriate here.

**Reasons Why Maintaining the Exclusion Is in the Public Interest:**

The NAO operates independently of government and examines public spending for Parliament. Our work helps Parliament hold government to account, increases transparency on matters of public interest, and drives improvement in how public resources are used. We acknowledge the public's interest in ensuring public funds are managed transparently and responsibly via effective audits but releasing sensitive audit information would harm the audit process. Given the detrimental impact of possible disclosure, it is appropriate to uphold the section 33 public audit exemption in this case.

**Response to point 7.**

We do not hold any information showing consideration of other threats as described in the request, in connection with the Severe space weather report. The Severe Space Weather study was proposed as a risk-specific study, it was not considered or analysed against other threats.

I hope this information is helpful. Our policy is to respond to requests made under the Freedom of Information Request Act 2000 as helpfully and promptly as possible, having regard to the principles set out in the Act. If you are not happy with this response, you can ask for an internal review within 40 working days by writing to the NAO FOI Team at FOI@nao.org.uk. If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, you have the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. The primary way of escalating your concerns to the Information Commissioner is at: https://ico.org.uk/foicomplaints.

Yours sincerely,

**FOI and Correspondence Officer**