

Climate preparedness and the role of mid-level actors in Sussex

Becky Carter, Researcher: b.carter@ids.ac.uk; **Shilpi Srivastava**, Research Fellow: s.srivastava2@ids.ac.uk

Study Overview

Aim: to explore strategies for climate preparedness under uncertainty in the UK.

Focus: mid-level actors – council climate officers, resilience forum coordinators, civil society actors such as adaptation leads.

Methods: qualitative, ethnography, participatory, creative and arts-based; from 2025–2029.

Stage: inception findings – feedback welcome.

RELIABLE Premise

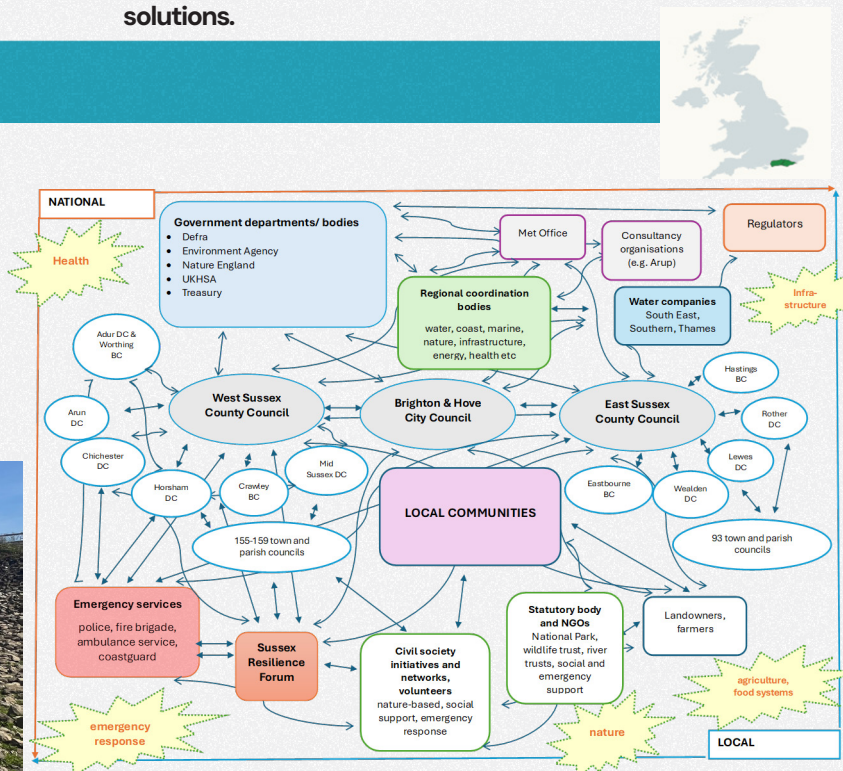
1. Rising climate uncertainty requires a shift from conventional risk prediction to reliability-focused approaches to keep essential services stable during extreme weather.
2. Mid-level actors are vital for building climate preparedness and resilience but are underexplored in policy and research.
3. Explore and learn from what is being done to co-produce solutions.

Sussex Context

- Located in the South East, an area among the most at risk in the UK for drought, heat and flooding (CCC, 2026; Environment Agency, 2026).
- Population 1.76 million; pockets of multi-dimensional deprivation in coastal and urban areas, ageing population and rural isolation in other parts.
- Multiple adaptation actors: local councils; the local resilience forum; water companies; national ministries and agencies; active civil society; others.



Low water levels at Ardingly Reservoir, Sussex (August 2026). Photo credit: Shilpi Srivastava



Mapping climate preparedness actors in Sussex. Source: Authors' own.

Inception Phase: Emerging Themes– What Works

Tackling structural barriers

including the lack of single adaptation duty, hollowed-out capacity, fragmented funding, siloed sectoral working

Bridging response and adaptation

to connect emergency planning and response with anticipatory preparedness and longer-term climate adaptation investment

Adopting a systems-based approach

to understand and leverage relationships and interactions between actors and their actions, to effect wider change at landscape scale

Supporting mid-level actors

in their capacity to 'govern on the go' (Srivastava, 2023) (interpret, innovate); their relational power ('people weaving'); their resilience (as individuals within organisations)

Informing approaches with lived experience

to ensure local ownership and evidence shaped by local knowledge, proven to improve effectiveness

Working with the political flow

by leveraging devolution and reorganisation to maximise climate action

References: Climate Change Committee (2026). *A Well-Adapted UK The Fourth Independent Assessment of UK Climate Risk (CCRA4-IA)*. Environment Agency (2026). *National assessment of flood and coastal erosion risk in England 2024 (updated 2026)*. Srivastava, S. (2023). *Proposal – UKRI Future Leaders Fellowships*.

RELIABLE is a UKRI Future Leaders Fellowship project at the Institute of Development Studies

