My Lords, I too am very grateful for the Select Committee’s work in tackling such an important subject, and in particular, I concur with the authors’ recognition that “the UK must move away from a risk management strategy which often ignores or fails to appreciate the interconnected nature of our society” and that we must instead “produce a risk management system that ties all sectors of society together.” Interdependence is a fundamental part of human nature and, I believe, policies which follow the grain of that nature are far more likely to succeed.

I was disappointed, therefore, that although the report advocated for a whole-society approach, no reference was made to the role of faith groups in emergency planning and response.

My Lords, faith groups and leaders across the country were an integral part of the response to Covid-19. A 2020 report by the APPG for Faith and Society, based on research with local authorities, found that faith communities were instrumental in offering buildings, running food banks, information sharing, befriending, collecting, cooking and delivering food, and providing volunteers for local authority programmes. Accordingly, the APPG found, local authorities developed a newfound appreciation for the agility, flexibility and professionalism of faith-based organisations, and that local authorities were keen to continue and build on these relationships for the future.

When I consulted with my own local public health team, I heard a similar account. In Leicester, throughout 2020 and 2021, there was a fortnightly Faiths Engagement Group which brought public bodies together with faith leaders to coordinate how to translate and disseminate important messages about the virus itself and the associated restrictions. Our city’s Director of Public Health, Professor Ivan Browne, told me – and I quote – “I would argue that any strategic document that in any way considers a community response to a crisis must consider the role of community and faith groups”.

Another example would be the 2016 floods where Khalsa Aid, a Sikh charity, together with groups of Muslim volunteers spent weeks in the affected towns of Lancashire and Yorkshire, serving thousands of hot meals and helping with the clean-up.

Across the UK, whenever there have been terror attacks or explosions, churches have opened to offer shelter and hospitality for those affected and for emergency services to base themselves. And of course, there is the Salvation Army, which as well as a Christian denomination, is one of the world’s largest providers of social aid and humanitarian assistance – frequently on the frontlines of the response to earthquakes, hurricanes, and tsunamis across the globe.

Even as we speak, faith-based organisations are responding to another national emergency, which might not require flashing blue lights or daily briefings but is shocking in its scale nevertheless. Across the country, and for several years now, churches, mosques, temples, gurdwaras and synagogues have been hosting and supporting food banks and community pantries. My Lords, faith groups may appear to be superfluous stakeholders to the Government Departments responsible for risk assessment and planning, but the children of God in need of food parcels may tell a different story.

Faith groups also have a distinct contribution to make in the face of crises. Beyond meeting material needs alone, they are often central in reinforcing a local sense of identity and the connections that comprise a community’s social fabric. The gift of our common life together can easily be disrupted by disaster or conflict, yet cannot be maintained or mended by a statutory service no matter how well-intentioned.

As well as their institutional presence then, most faiths have an other-centredness at their core that prepares their members to be willing, as well as to help. Week in, week out, most people of faith are working in growing in patience, generosity, temperance, wisdom and, most importantly, compassion.

With this in mind I suggest that the Select Committee’s report go further when it speaks about the role of education in building our society’s resilience.

We should also consider how our education system can build what psychologists identify as the five pillars of resilience - Self Awareness, Mindfulness, Self-Care, Positive Relationships and Sense of Purpose. These are the building-blocks of a resilient citizeny.

With this in mind, if the Civil Contingencies Act is to be updated, as the Select Committee recommends, to reflect the importance of several societal organisations not recognised in the current legislation, might I suggest faith groups and faith-based organisations are also included.