

AI use in Resilience

A practical human
centred introduction

Tom Watkins
Policy & Insight Lead
VCS Emergencies Partnership





Welcome & Context

Today's session is about how AI can support real practice: the human work of preparedness, response and recovery you lead every day.

We all bring deep experience with people, with communities, navigating uncertainty with care and human intelligence. That's our anchor.

I'm not here as a salesperson or a tech evangelist. Just a pragmatic user who uses AI carefully and purposefully.

Tone for today: conversational, informal and always respectful of the serious, human-centred work we do.

Your current use of AI...



My Position

Neutral, practical stance

Grounded in real-world use, not hype. No products, sales, or hidden agenda.

Human expertise first

Voluntary and statutory partners bring context, empathy, and deep knowledge.

AI should complement never replace.

Warm, honest facilitation

Demystify AI and ease mixed confidence levels.

Responsible use matters more than mastery.

*Resilience is a **HUMAN** skillset*



Session Overview

What we'll cover

Demystify AI, practical uses in UK resilience, benefits and risks.

How we'll explore

Real examples of AI going well and not so well and prompting honest discussion.

Case study

Environment Agency: AI use that supports public engagement. Enhancing, not replacing, human connection.

Participation

Discussion is woven in; a safe space to challenge assumptions and align with lived experience.

Foundations of AI

What AI Is, Simply

Pattern-spotting & prediction at scale

AI models predict the next likely word, image, or step from patterns in data.

Useful, yet sometimes wrong

It can be confident, biased, or incomplete because it predicts plausibility, not truth.

Not thinking or understanding

AI doesn't reason like humans. It statistically maps inputs to likely outputs.

Optimises for satisfaction

Systems are tuned for helpfulness and user approval, so human oversight is always essential.



AI Tools and Applications

Types of AI Tools

Generative AI

Creates text or images to draft, summarise, and support creative exploration.

Predictive Analytics

Uses historical and real-time data to forecast outcomes for planning and demand.

Classification & Clustering

Sorts data into categories, finds patterns, and detects anomalies at scale.

Assistive Tools

Reduce admin by transcribing meetings, summarising documents, and structuring information... Or bespoke chat bots

Each category offers opportunities for resilience work, with specific limits and oversight needs.

What is an LLM?

A Large Language Model is a tool trained on huge amounts of text.

It doesn't think — it just predicts the next likely word based on patterns



AI in UK Resilience Work

Where AI Helps in UK Resilience

First-draft writing

Speed up SOPs, briefs, emails, and press notes humans review and approve.

Summarise and synthesise

Distil long complex reports, incident logs, and guidance into clear, actionable points.

Scenario generation

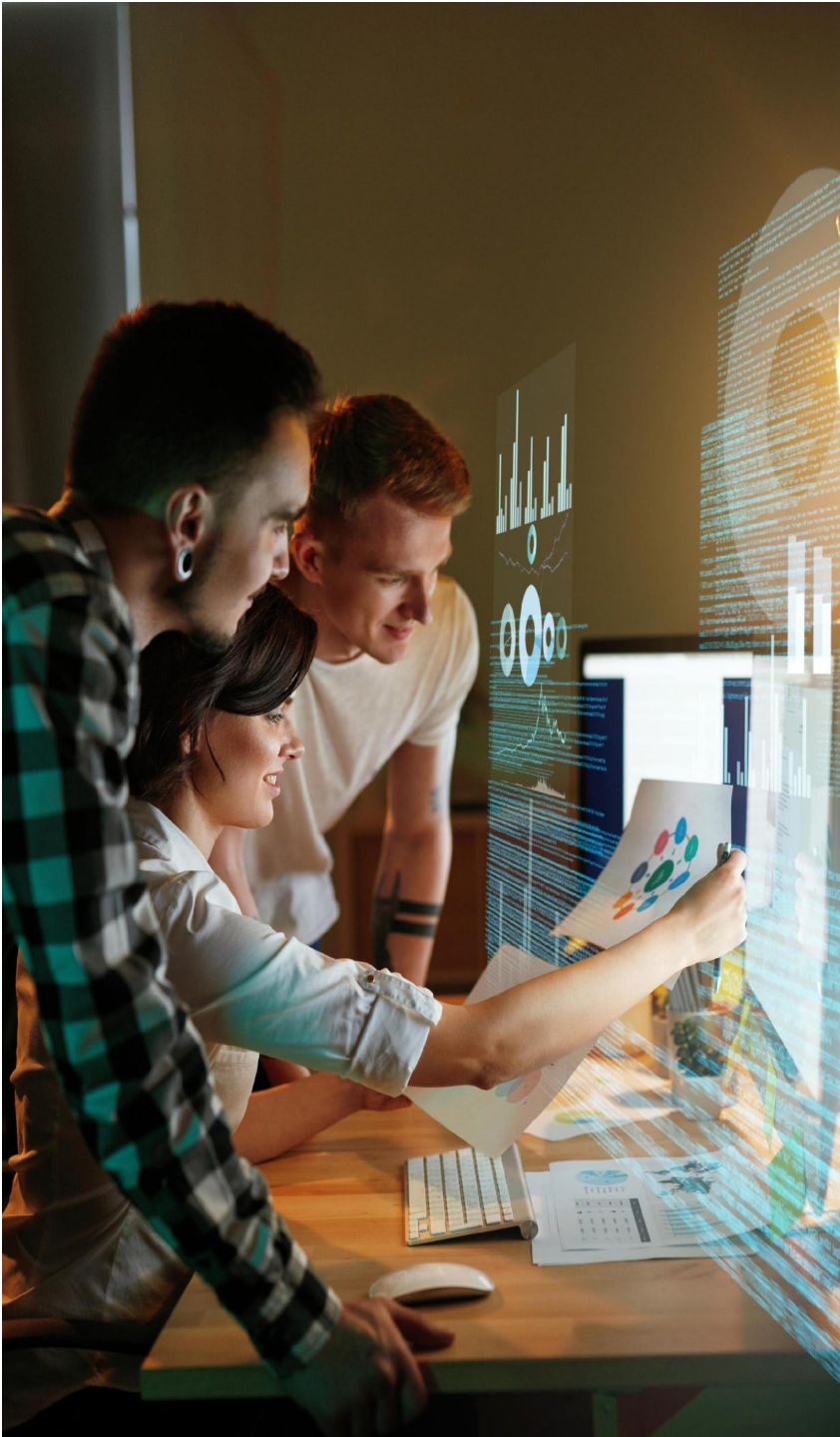
Create varied injects and what-ifs for planning and exercises at speed.

Capacity, not replacement

Offload repetitive tasks so people focus on empathy, decisions, and coordination.

Question: Where would added capacity or clarity help in your organisation? AI is the 'co-pilot' but people make the calls.





Good Uses of AI in Practice

Draft, then refine

Use AI to draft emails, briefs, or outlines that humans polish for tone, nuance, and accuracy.

Verify summaries against source

Generate a summary, then check claims against the original document to confirm fidelity.

Scenario variations for exercises

Quickly spin alternative scenarios for tabletop drills to explore risks and responses.

Prompt fresh angles in brainstorming

Use AI as a collaborator to spark ideas or reduce workload, guided by skilled humans.

Question: How do these examples align with your organisation's needs and experiences?

Risks, Failures & Human Oversight

Misuses / Failures

Where AI goes wrong

- Confidently incorrect answers i.e.
fabricated refs/policies
- Misleading summaries; flawed risk prioritisation
- Amplified biases from training data

Why these failures happen

AI lacks context, ethics, and real-world nuance.

Human judgment stays in charge

Be a critical reviewer, over-reliance damages skills, trust, and resilience.



Preserving Our Human & Institutional Faculties

We can't outsource our brains to AI

AI can be incredibly useful — but it can also be confidently wrong.

If we stop doing the thinking ourselves, our individual judgement, problem-solving skills, and organisational memory can weaken over time. In resilience work, that's a risk we simply can't take.

Skills atrophy when unused.

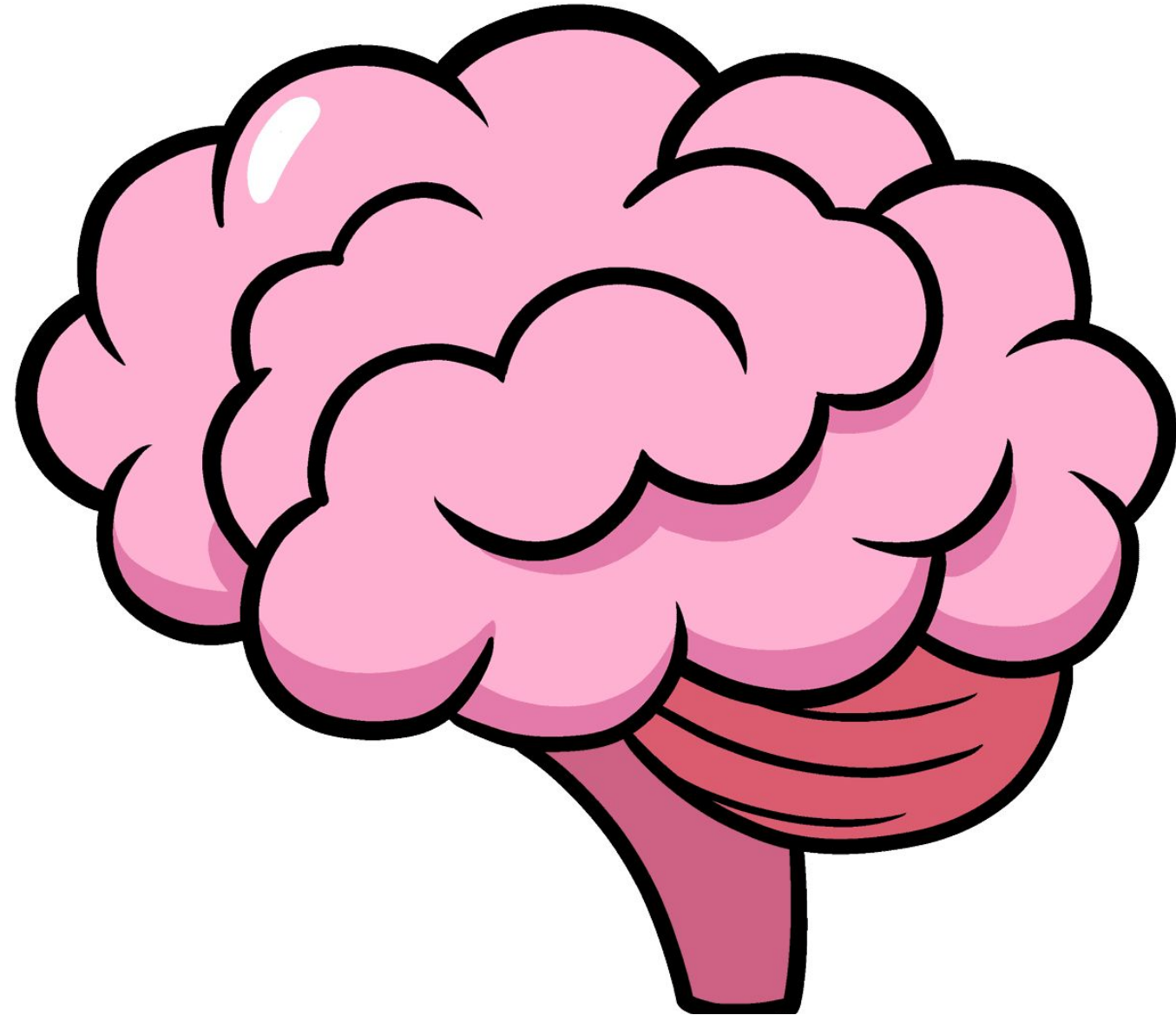
If we allow AI to make decisions or solve problems for us, we gradually lose the ability to do those things reliably without it.

Technology is fallible.

AI can fail, systems can go down, data can be wrong, and models can misinterpret context. In emergencies, this can have real-world consequences.

We need analogue fallbacks.

Maps, local knowledge, procedures written in plain language, simple checklists, phone trees, human contacts these save the day when digital tools don't.



AI & Bias

A helpful nudge, but not a perfect fix

**If we ask it to AI can challenge our thinking
- but not always effectively**

It can still reflect the biases in its training data, or introduce new ones of its own.

If we rely on it to spot or remove bias *for us*, we may miss important context or judgement calls.

Human awareness, reflection and scrutiny remain essential.

AI can help us examine our assumptions, but it can't replace our own critical thinking.



Case Study Environment Agency: Hello Lamppost

Emily Whittingham

Flood Resilience Engagement Advisor
Kent, South London and East Sussex Area (KSLES)
Environment Agency

Environment Agency: Hello Lamppost

AI in public engagement

This work shows AI used well for resilience, connecting communities to flood preparedness through accessible conversations.

Hello Lamppost chatbot

Designed to augment human outreach, broadening reach, simplifying and enhancing engagement, and providing timely, local information.

Human-centred by design

When ethically deployed and aligned with community needs, AI strengthens capacity without replacing personal contact.

From workshop to practice

We invite participants to imagine similar opportunities inside their own organisations.



What Does the Future Hold?

Humanitarian AI in 2026

- **People are adopting AI faster than they can be guided to use it** → inconsistent, sometimes risky use.
- **AI fatigue is growing** → mixed results mean teams can be hesitant to try new tools.
- **Scaling is difficult** → many tools stay as pilots due to limited funding and capacity.
- **Weak digital foundations limit impact** → without good data and systems, AI can't deliver.

Then there's ethical considerations...

*Ethical practice means using AI in ways that **support**, not harm, communities*



Further ahead...?

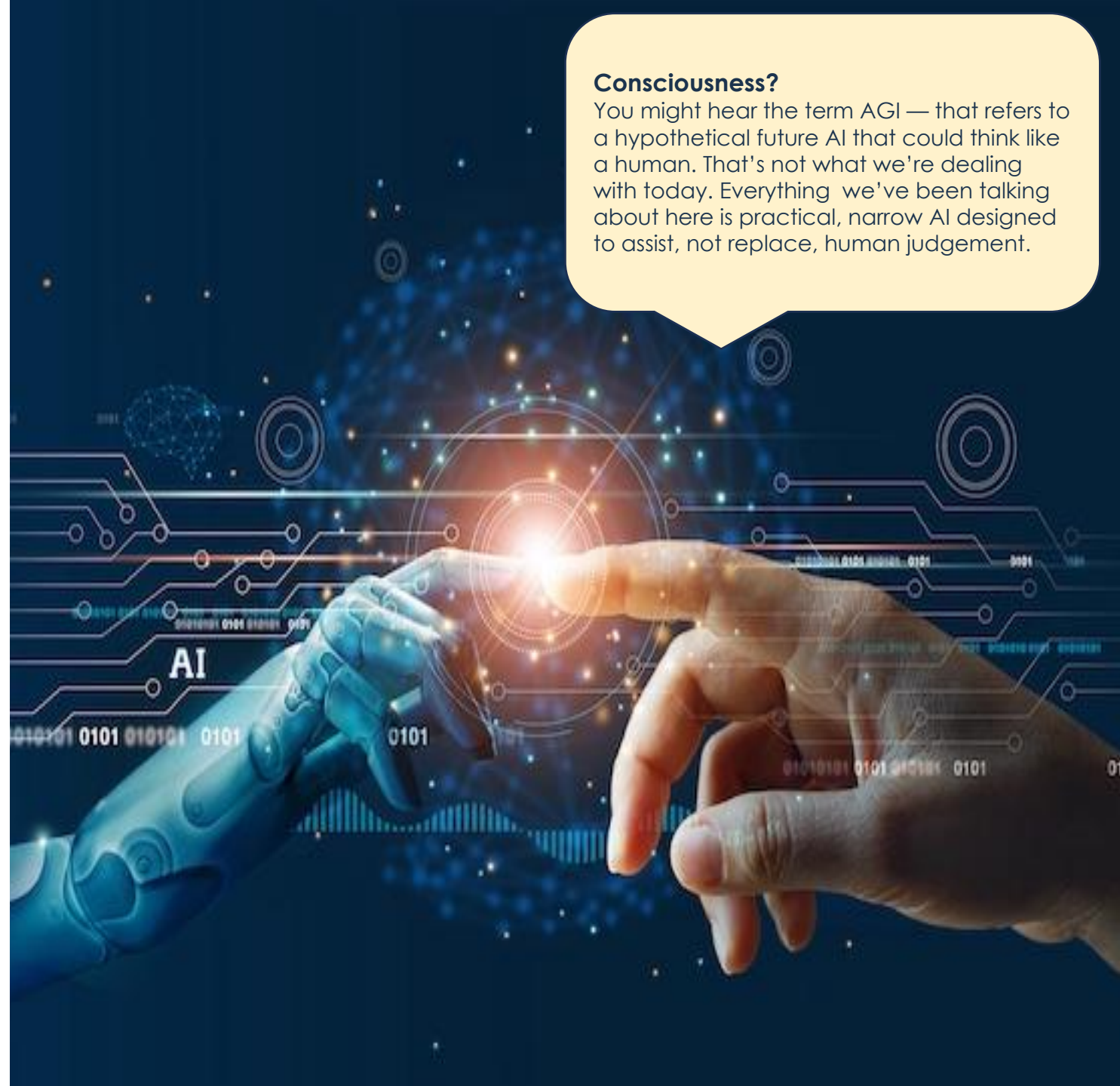
Who knows...?

AI is becoming **more useful, more accessible, and easier to shape** around real community needs.

The humanitarian sector expects AI to support **better fundraising, smoother operations, and more impactful services** in the coming years.

As we strengthen our digital basics and human skills, AI can help us **free up more time for human connection, judgement and care** — the things only people can do.

*The future isn't about replacing us — it's about **creating more space for the human part of resilience to shine.***



Consciousness?

You might hear the term AGI — that refers to a hypothetical future AI that could think like a human. That's not what we're dealing with today. Everything we've been talking about here is practical, narrow AI designed to assist, not replace, human judgement.

Principles & Closing

Key Principle

"Do not ask AI to do something you cannot assess yourself."

If you cannot judge whether an output is right or wrong, AI should not be the one making the judgement for you. Effective AI use requires scrutiny, context awareness, and critical thinking — qualities only humans provide.

Preserve human intelligence, community insight, and lived experience. AI should expand the space for those strengths, not diminish them.

Leave today with agency and confidence: you don't need to be a technical expert to use AI safely and meaningfully — stay curious, critical, and rooted in human-centred practice.

