

Recruiting Volunteers Safely for Your Organisation

A guide to maximising the use of volunteers whilst limiting harm - this was originally written during the Covid-19 outbreak but the guidance here is still relevant in a time of crisis.

It is heartening in a time of crisis that people want to help, but it is important that we continue to apply a common-sense approach to the recruitment of volunteers and ensure that people are recruited safely and effectively.

Unfortunately there are people who will seek to involve themselves in volunteer or neighbourhood activities for the wrong reasons and there have already been a number of cases across the country of criminal activity, particularly financial abuse, related to gaining access to vulnerable people and properties.

It is imperative that in all roles you make it clear to both the beneficiary and the volunteer that no financial transactions will take place and no bank cards/online details/passwords will be asked for. A helpful resource from Age UK about how to protect yourself from doorstep scams can be found at <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/money-legal/scams-fraud/doorstep-scams/>.

This resource works on the assumption that, as a current Volunteer Involving Organisation (VIO), your processes and procedures relating to recruiting safely are already in place. Our recommendation is not to reduce your standards in the face of this crisis, but use a common-sense approach, particularly in relation to roles involving new volunteers, and that you limit access to personal data.

As a starting point:

- Identify at least two to three people currently employed or volunteering for your organisation that can take the role of Volunteer Co-ordinator. Ideally these will have already completed vulnerable adult safeguarding training. This will allow you to have a Shift Leader for each day of operation, with a consistent approach and understanding of safeguarding issues, build in contingency for staff illness, and ensure that access to personal data about beneficiaries is limited.
- When registering a person in need of help, ensure that you collect a **next of kin contact** who should be referred to in all incidences of need or concern outside of the immediate task your volunteer is involved in. The Shift Leader should be the main point of contact for any issues arising through the volunteer activity and be the referral point for concerns. We suggest that you have a single contact number that is used by all the shift leaders.

In normal circumstances interviews, references and DBS checks for certain roles would need to be in place. However, in times of crisis, normal access to the checks and balances of safer recruitment may be limited and we need to take a sensible pragmatic view by maximising the use of interested volunteers whilst limiting harm.

The key to a safe approach is to have roles that enable help to be given whilst minimising the volunteer's access to personal data, with clear boundaries in place in relation to the functions that the volunteers carry out, and the relationship with the beneficiary.

Likely roles in times of crisis are:

- supplying emergency food parcels
- telephone befriending
- collecting prescriptions ([click here for NHS advice on collecting for someone else](#))
Please note that non-prescribed medication for symptom relief (e.g. paracetamol) will need to be labelled via the pharmacist

Some organisations prioritise those who already have a DBS for volunteer roles they are involved with elsewhere, and there are a large number of professionals already in regulated activities, such as teaching, who are seeking to offer help. DBS checks are useful, but as we know they are only a snapshot in time and it is important that even for those with DBS checks, other checks are completed.

Be clear that these are temporary roles, and should they wish to volunteer in the future for your organisation that checks and assessments specific to those roles will apply.

Minimum checks for new volunteers that we recommend:

- Collect name, address, contact details and Proof of ID (passport / driving licence/ birth certificate/ proof of address with recent utility bills)
- Ask for two references which can be taken verbally
- Photo for ID will be helpful to reassure people that are being delivered to and also in the event of movement restrictions to evidence legitimacy.

For roles where DBS checks are required, they are available, and local organisations with online facilities already set up are reporting that they are taking two weeks.

Do not involve volunteers in roles that require DBS checks if they do not have a DBS check for your organisation for that specific role.

Once you have completed your checks

Have a standard e-mail which needs to include:

- a requirement to read and sign that they have understood your **Safeguarding Policy**.
- a requirement to read and sign your **Code of Conduct** and **Confidentiality Agreement**.
- the requirement that all personal details are shared solely for the purpose of the task. These should be deleted once that task is completed.

The above can be done electronically. Keep the email trail to evidence this.

- your Privacy Statement in relation to use of personal data (GDPR compliance and Data Protection Act 2018). To be fully compliant, a Privacy Notice needs to be quite detailed, however, the [ICO have a simple checklist](#) and this [example from Age UK](#) is helpful.
- include a Volunteer Agreement specific to the Coronavirus outbreak.
- if your organisation has access to online safeguarding training, ask them to complete this.
- keep a simple checklist or record, whether as an online form or paper document, of each volunteer's agreement to abide by your policies and their completion of any required actions.

Additional information that could be helpful to include:

- A good explanation of safeguarding can be found at the [NCVO website](#).
- Public Health England has produced comprehensive guidance applicable to specific groups which is helpful to include in your volunteer information - [Guidance on social distancing for everyone in the UK and specifically for the protection of older people and the vulnerable](#).

Role descriptions

For each volunteer role, break the role down into its activities and consider the risks associated with each activity.

Example – collecting non-prescribed medication

Non-prescribed medication for symptom relief (eg. paracetamol) cannot be given unless it is labelled by a pharmacist, as they could be contradictory to a person's other medication.

Prepare text for each opportunity that describes:

- the activity
- the functions that will be delivered
- include related safeguarding information.

*Be clear that anyone who thinks they are experiencing symptoms should let the Shift Leader know and **must not volunteer** (<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>).*

It is recommended that volunteers work in pairs, observing social distancing guidelines. Make sure that your agency knows where your volunteers are at all times and advise the beneficiary when they should expect the delivery or volunteer activity being provided.

Some have been using telephone messaging systems such as WhatsApp groups for communication with volunteers. People should only be added to the group if they have been checked and completed the processes identified above.

Ensure that your Confidentiality Agreement includes the requirement to not identify or verbally discuss beneficiaries outside of the parameters set by your organisation and not share or comment about them on social media platforms or in any other way.

Example Volunteer Role Description - Delivery of Food Parcels

Thank you for your time and compassion. It is much appreciated.

Information about the activity you are helping with today can be found below. Please follow the instructions below and ***do not undertake any activity that falls outside of the task-specific volunteering role you are in.***

The NHS recommends that the following precautions are taken to help prevent people from catching and spreading COVID-19:

- wash your hands with soap and water often – do this for at least 20 seconds
- always wash your hands when you get home or into work
- use hand sanitiser gel if soap and water are not available
- cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when you cough or sneeze
- put used tissues in the bin immediately and wash your hands afterwards

Be clear that anyone who thinks they are experiencing symptoms should let the Shift Leader know and ***must not volunteer*** (<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>).

Please check the NHS website for regular updates on advice and make sure that you follow the advice - <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>.

In this role:

- Wash your hands fully (at least 20 secs) and regularly
- Use hand sanitiser between deliveries
- Ring the bell, or knock on the door, then leave bag(s) on the doorstep
- Wait at a safe distance (minimum 2m) to see the person opens the door
- Avoid physical contact but speak to them and check they are okay
- Avoid going inside anyone's home
- Be clear that you cannot take money, bank cards or help with any financial transactions
- Ask the person you are helping to wash their hands (particularly after receiving deliveries)

If the person you are helping thinks they have COVID-19 tell them to call 111 or look for guidance online - <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>.

If you have concerns for the persons health or wellbeing do not attempt to deal with it yourself but refer to your Shift Leader who will take appropriate action (include the number).

Your duty of care to your volunteers

Keep them safe

- Know where they are and when they have completed their shift.
- Set up a check-in system.
- Make sure you have adequate Personal Accident insurance and check the age range it covers (usually 18+ years).
- Make sure that the insurance you have is adequate for the volunteer role that you are asking them to do.

Keep them well

- Provide all necessary equipment - eg. gloves, hand sanitiser.
- Provide advice on manual handling.
- Limit their hours, especially related to driving.
- Advise them to keep hydrated and fed by keeping food and water with them.
- Check for any pre-existing medical conditions and allocate tasks accordingly.
- Emphasise that if they feel at all unwell that they should not volunteer and have no obligation. They are free to leave, or pause, at any time but should try and make sure they let the organisation know in good time so that shifts can be covered.

Keep them motivated – let them know...

- you appreciate their time.
- you are there to talk about any worries and concerns.
- that their mental wellbeing is of the uppermost importance.

Useful sources of information

Government advice – www.gov.uk:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/coronavirus-covid-19-uk-government-response>

Achieving for Children – www.kr.afcinfo.org.uk

Kingston and Richmond Safeguarding Partnership –

www.kingstonandrichmondsafeguardingchildrenpartnership.org.uk

Richmond Safeguarding Adults Board - www.richmond.gov.uk/sab

For anyone experiencing abuse or at risk of abuse, report concerns online at

https://www.richmond.gov.uk/services/adult_social_care/safeguarding_adults/report_adult_abuse.

Mayor of London – www.london.gov.uk

Find centralised resources specific to London at <https://www.london.gov.uk/coronavirus>.

NHS England – www.nhs.uk

Find guidance from the NHS at <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>.

Public Health England – www.gov.uk

Find general information on Coronavirus at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/public-health-england>.

Or specific guidance for supporting different client groups at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-list-of-guidance>.

Richmond CVS – www.richmondcvs.org.uk

Our own guidance and information webpage is available at <https://richmondcvs.org.uk/covid-19-information-and-advice/>.