

Guidance for Community Groups in North Yorkshire

Across the country people are expressing the desire to help others in their local communities who are affected by, or self-isolating, from the Covid-19 virus. The Covid-19 Mutual Aid UK group set up over the weekend

www.facebook.com/CovidAidUK/ now has nearly 800 affiliated groups, including many across communities in North Yorkshire.

This burst of spontaneous volunteering by individuals demonstrates the real value of social action in our communities, yet there are things that need to be considered by both people offering their support and people who are co-ordinating local actions.

Despite the crisis, the safety of volunteers, communities and responders is paramount. The following advice is taken from the Government's 'Planning the Co-ordination of Spontaneous Volunteers in Emergencies (June 2019)' and notes some of the key considerations. There is a link to the full document available on the Community First Yorkshire [website](#).

Volunteer Involving Process – The guide suggests that before volunteers are involved, consideration needs to be given to a number of areas, including but not limited to: Is essential information about the emergency and its effects on the community known? Is it known who else is involved in the emergency and their specific roles? What policies, procedures and processes will be needed to ensure the safety of all involved? Will any equipment be required for tasks that have been identified as suitable to allocate to volunteers? Will any out-of-pocket expenses incurred by volunteers be reimbursed e.g. mileage costs, bus fares? (If expenses are to be reimbursed, it is advisable to put a process in place enabling this to be done).

Involve Partner Organisations – Wherever possible it is suggested a local approach should be co-ordinated with existing volunteer led organisations who are familiar with co-ordinating, managing and supporting volunteers. These agencies may also refer other local people requiring volunteer support.

Ideally the relevant partner agencies will ensure all insurance and liability issues are fully addressed before the deployment of volunteers, for example public and employer liability insurance that is appropriate and proportionate.

Each organisation will need to decide how it wishes to involve spontaneous volunteers, how it will supervise them and the sort of tasks they may be asked to perform.

Consideration will also need to be given to including but not limited to; manual handling, hazard and work protocols, safety and security procedures, confidentiality, safeguarding, the use of social media and the taking of photographs while deployed.

Information for volunteers should be proportionate and can be shared face to face or via an online induction briefing, information document or handbook. Wherever possible unnecessary bureaucracy or delays in sharing information should be

avoided as this may be communicated via social media detracting from the benefits of arrangements for the local community.

Appoint a Co-ordinator and /or Task Team– It is a good idea to appoint someone who will take overall responsibility for managing volunteers as part of the wider response. Ideally this would be done by an employee of an organisation who has good knowledge and experience of working with volunteers. The guide suggests the co-ordinator should have three main objectives:

- a. Link with the existing multi-agency command and co-ordination arrangements to establish tasks that might be suitable for volunteers;
- b. Liaise with people allocating tasks and receiving feedback from supervisors on-site; and
- c. Overseeing the process of assessing, tasking and deploying volunteers.

It is noted that people in this role will ideally need to have an understanding of health & safety, risks; safeguarding policy and procedures, an understanding of how volunteers can help achieve operational and personal objectives and the processes that assist the coordination of spontaneous volunteers, such as assessing, tasking, monitoring and gaining feedback.

Key responsibilities for a co-ordinator, task supervisor and other roles are outlined at Annex B of the above guide. It is also recommended that Elected Members, including parish councillors, are made aware of local arrangements.

Safeguarding - Organisations involved will need to review relevant safeguarding policies and procedures to make certain that despite challenging circumstances safeguarding best practice is adhered to. ***The guide notes “Volunteers should never be deployed into a situation where they would have unsupervised contact with any child or vulnerable adult and should never be placed in a one-to-one situation with a vulnerable person (all children are vulnerable persons due to their age)”. Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks are only required if volunteers are put into regular, unsupervised contact with vulnerable groups which takes time and is not always appropriate or possible during an emergency. Spontaneous volunteers should be made aware of safeguarding issues before deployment and should know how to report any issues they may encounter.***

Minimum age – The guide states that particular attention must be given to the needs, safeguarding responsibilities and emotional welfare of children (anyone under the age of 18), because it is likely to be difficult to ensure the safety of children during an emergency response. ***It is recommended that all volunteers during the emergency response should be over 18. If in doubt, proof of age should be requested during the assessment process.***

Health and Safety - The HSE emphasises that whilst the majority of volunteering opportunities are low risk, taking a sensible, proportionate approach is the key to

making sure things go smoothly. In any event, it is essential to maintain the names of those deployed (including where whole groups present), the location of where they have been assigned; and the task they have been asked to undertake.

The guide offers further information on a number of areas including re-distribution of donated items: sorting out clothing/bagging up food parcels; assisting with evacuated pets; provision of light refreshments; cleaning; assisting with re-occupation of homes/affected sites; physical labour (such as street/house clean up); providing a social media information outlet locally; door-to-door warning and checking on residents and delivering leaflets.

Risk Assessments - Underpinning tasks should be the completion of risk assessments. Some volunteers may require additional briefings should they be deployed to a more involved or complex task. Risk assessments should be periodically reviewed by organisations to identify how to further reduce risks.

Communication - Clear, consistent and timely communication is essential to ensure the successful direction of potential spontaneous volunteers. A variety of messages and delivery methods should be used in order to let people know what's happening, minimise confusion and clarify expectations.

Expectations - It is important to manage the expectations of volunteers. They may arrive in response to specific requests, but evidence suggests that most will arrive simply to get involved. Spontaneous volunteers may not agree with any process put in place to provide safe practices, and will likely expect to provide immediate practical assistance.

Registration – Volunteers should be asked to complete a simple registration form or card providing contact and other details so that their availability and suitability can be established and assessed. The assessment should be done in a proportionate and timely way before spontaneous volunteers are tasked and deployed. It is important to identify any individual needs or requirements so that these can be addressed. The processing of data must be done in accordance with GDPR regulations and only for the purpose for which it is provided.

Volunteer ID – Consider creating an identification card or high visibility jacket which would provide information to official responders, the public and other stakeholders about a spontaneous volunteers association with the official response. Another option is to use coloured arm or wrist bands to identify particular roles and tasks.

Unsuitable Volunteers - It may be that some people who come forward are not suitable for the roles available, perhaps for medical reasons or other factors affecting their ability to carry out the tasks required. It is important to explore all possible opportunities for involvement but if this is not possible thank the volunteer and explain that they are not required on this occasion. The guide notes that having a criminal conviction does not, in most cases, exclude someone from volunteering, but it might define the work they are tasked and the supervision required.

Offer a 'Tasking Board' – This can outline the roles likely to be available so that potential volunteers have an indication of what they might be tasked with (without reference to specific individuals). As far as practicable, a list of approved tasks suitable for spontaneous volunteers should be identified in advance and these allocated depending on what is required, the risk assessment and the volunteers' capability and demands of the task. A record keeping process should be established to monitor where volunteers are deployed and the hours they have assisted. It is important that volunteers understand the task they have been given and know how to report back should any issues arise.

Volunteer Supervision - Appropriate monitoring and supervision of volunteers can help reduce the level of risk associated with volunteers' duties and increase the satisfaction of volunteers and recipients of assistance.

Consider Volunteer Welfare - Volunteers should not feel overcommitted or overloaded. An essential part of involving volunteers is to offer support and gain their feedback on what they have been doing. In extreme circumstances some individuals may need signposting to support services as some might have unknowingly been exposed to stressful or upsetting events.

Confidentiality - Volunteers should be aware that they can talk to others generally about their involvement and why they offered assistance, but they should not identify any specific individual or situation they have been involved with.

Recognition – It is important to recognise the contribution of volunteers. Communicate regularly about the number of households and individuals that have received help and how many still need support. All volunteers should be thanked for giving-up their time to assist and letters of thanks might be considered appropriate in some circumstances.

Future Volunteering - After the incident, communicate how they may continue to volunteer. The organisation should consider the longer-term roles that volunteers can have in the on-going recovery. For example, before the volunteers leave the site the organisation should communicate:

- a. The resources that will remain after the official response phase has ended and any continuing roles available to volunteers;
- b. The role of the community in its own long-term recovery and how volunteers may further support this; and
- c. The opportunities available to join a voluntary organisation aligned to the tasks they have been delivering as a volunteer, such as the organised voluntary sector or groups already established by emergency services.

If you're looking for a volunteering opportunity or you need to find a volunteer in North Yorkshire, [Volunteering In North Yorkshire](#) (VINY) can help.

Problem Solving – Consideration should be given to the potential reputational damage posed by the involvement of spontaneous volunteers, for example but not limited to:

- a. Breaches in confidentiality;
- b. Misrepresentation of the organisation to the public/media;
- c. Misconduct by volunteers;
- d. Harm to volunteers or those they help;
- e. Lack of cultural sensitivity and/or the use of abusive or discriminatory language;
and
- f. Provision of misinformation.

If a volunteer is reported to have breached any of the above, or believed to have behaved in an inappropriate manner, the coordinator should have the authority to tell the volunteer that their assistance will not be further required and the offer of help terminated and recorded.