

Managing Risks when working with Volunteers: A Guide for Local Councils

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Summary

This guide has been created to provide local (parish and town) councils with information on managing volunteers and the associated risks during the Coronavirus outbreak. While it should not be used as a substitute for government or other appropriate professional advice, there is some useful and practical guidance to help local councils plan ahead and manage risks.

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1. Supporting vulnerable people locally

Many councils will already have made significant progress in developing volunteering systems and networks to support and protect people who are vulnerable as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.a. What can volunteers do?

Volunteers can help out and support their community in many ways, as long as they are adhering to govern guidelines and social distancing. This includes:

- Helping with shopping
- Collecting medication
- Staying in touch over the phone or via social media
- Encouraging people to stay mentally and physically active
- Sharing trusted sources of information
- Take part in neighbourly volunteering

1.b. Where can you find volunteering opportunities?

There are many volunteering roles available to choose from. Councils can find lots of different opportunities by visiting:

- [Do-IT](#)
- [Volunteering Matters](#)
- [Reach Volunteering](#)
- Your local volunteer centre
- [Find your local NAVCA \(National Association for Voluntary and Community Action\) member](#)
- [CharityJob](#)

1.c. Working with charities and community groups

Charities and community groups will need to work closely with their local councils in order to coordinate help and support to where it is most needed.

Councils who are coordinating their own volunteer groups will need to liaise with other charity organisations to ensure there is not an overlap in services, and that the newly formed groups are being run as efficiently as possible.

Local councils can also refer people needing assistance to NHS Volunteer Responders. Referrals should be made via the NHS Volunteer Responders referrers' portal. The portal can be found [here](#).

Through our charity specialist arm, [BHIB Charities Insurance](#), we have created a guide for volunteers who are looking to set up their own support group. The guide can be found [here](#).

1.d. Local neighbourhood and mutual aid groups

[COVID-19 Mutual Aid UK](#) has been set up by a group of volunteers to support local community groups organising help and support during the COVID-19 outbreak. Their focus is on providing resources and connecting people to their nearest local groups, volunteers and those who are most vulnerable.

There are now thousands of local groups across the country. They have plotted where these groups are on an interactive map on their website, showing the street or neighbourhood that the group operates in.

If a local council has a [Parish Online](#) subscription, they can use this data to map out the support groups that exist in their area. This will help councils to identify areas without local neighbourhood support groups so that they can offer additional support here. Take a look [here](#) at how local councils are using Parish Online to fight the coronavirus outbreak.

Please note: COVID-19 Mutual Aid UK are not an official organisation or charity and local groups are not officially affiliated with them.

1.e. Mental health of volunteers

Both residents and volunteers are facing new challenges to their daily lives due to the pandemic. Local councils have a duty of care to their volunteers and need to ensure that the volunteers who are giving up their time to help those in need are also kept safe, both physically and mentally.

Therefore it is important to regularly check in with the volunteers. Local councils should reassure volunteers that this is a new situation but it may continue for some time so they should take time for themselves, then continue supporting those who need it over the coming months.

Information is readily available at [MIND](#), [Mental Health Foundation](#) and the [NHS](#) for local councils to signpost their volunteers to. As well as this, through our charity specialist arm, [BHIB Charities Insurance](#), we have published a study about volunteering and the effects of mental health across different age groups, the type of volunteering and the volume of hours spent volunteering. The study can be found [here](#).

2. Key considerations for councils in coordinating local support

2.a. Communication and leadership

Councils are best placed to take the lead on coordinating local activity to protect different vulnerable groups during the COVID-19 outbreak. Councils should seek to build on their existing networks, contacts, and knowledge about the new local networks that have developed in response to COVID-19.

Councils will also want to ensure that the support available is being communicated to their communities and consider how best to work with local community and voluntary groups to ensure those messages are reaching the right people.

Take a look at section 4 for communication support and examples for local councils.

2.b. Information sharing

Councils will be collecting lots of data to identify local needs, which will be vital in supporting vulnerable individuals or families. Local councils also may be sharing information about vulnerable groups and individuals.

With Parish Online, it is possible to anonymise the data being shared and not include the name or details of those who need help. Using PDF printouts will control the way of sharing information to volunteers and the public without sharing other information not relevant to the role.

2.c. Cyber Insurance

We know councils might need to share information quickly or adapt the way they work. Most of the council staff will be homeworking during the pandemic and will be required to use devices or communications equipment – therefore councils should consider security measures during this period.

Here are some of our tips to help councils and staff to stay secure during this period:

- Ensure email protection is up-to-date
- Raise awareness of phishing
- Use updated versions and latest patches
- Enable use of cloud storage for files and data
- Train employees on Cybersecurity

Take a look at more of our Cybersecurity tips to keep councils online data safe [here](#).

3. Examples of volunteering campaigns carried out by councils

3.a. 'Here to Help' campaign

Worcestershire County Council has launched a new ['Here 2 Help' campaign](#) to help identify potential volunteers. The council has created an online form to find those who are prepared to volunteer goods, services or assistance for residents who need it.

3.b. #TogetherWeCan campaign

[Together We Can](#) is an initiative led by Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council, working in close partnership with many other public, private and voluntary sector organisations, as well as community groups and residents. It aims to bring the local community together to offer help and support to vulnerable people in the area.

Their dedicated COVID-19 community response helpline is open 8am to 8pm, 7 days a week. Call them on 0300 1237052.

3.c. Matching community groups and charities with volunteers

Plymouth City Council have helped community groups and charities gain access to resources they need through the [Plymouth Good Neighbours Scheme](#). The council runs this initiative through an online platform, which invites these groups to raise specific support requests while asking potential volunteers to share the skills and resources they have to offer.

For any further queries about the Good Neighbours scheme, please email goodneighbours@plymouth.gov.uk.

3.d. Mental Health Champions

Cheshire East Council has appointed two councillors as ['Mental Health Champions'](#) to work across the communities of Cheshire East and internally within the council. The aim is to help combat the isolation, anxiety, stress and worry many will feel during the coronavirus outbreak.

Residents can contact the dedicated local staff on 0300 303 3972 if their mental or emotional state quickly gets worse or deteriorates, and they will help the residents to access the support they need.

4. Communication

Local Councils can support volunteers in a number of ways, including through effective signposting and sharing the Government's guidance on helping others safely. Some examples include:

- Publishing guidelines online for community volunteers that could include safety tips for residents who wish to set up a private community WhatsApp or Facebook group. A great example is Hackney Council's safety tips. [Click here](#) to see them.
- Setting up a volunteers pack for local residents intending to set up their own volunteer group. A great example is given by Wiltshire Council who have created a volunteer pack. [Click here](#) to download.
- Councils should ask any volunteers to let them know what activities they're undertaking in the area by completing a short survey. If a council has Parish Online, gathering this data allows the council to keep their community group map up-to-date and accurate. [Click here](#) to view Wiltshire Council's volunteers survey.
- Setting up a dedicated Facebook page to encourage individuals and businesses to volunteer to support vulnerable people in the community. [Click here](#) to find out how Essex County Council have approached it.

5. Managing your risks

5.a. Useful tips and guidance

Below are some useful tips and guidance from our Risk Manager, Brian Brookes, for individuals who are in the process of setting up a voluntary group, including what to consider when arranging insurance for volunteers.

- 1) **Complete a risk assessment.** This will help councils to consider the risks and put in actions to reduce the risks to volunteers. We have a generic risk assessment document which is detailed below.
- 2) **Involve volunteers in planning.** Include volunteers in decision making around plans and policies affecting them. Having volunteers at the table will ensure that their immediate concerns are heard and addressed.
- 3) **Align the right volunteers with the right job.** Take advantage of volunteers' knowledge and experiences in a safe and effective way.
- 4) **Provide training about potential safety concerns.** Send volunteers on first aid and CPR training. Make sure volunteers know when and how to notify staffers about unsafe conditions or potential hazards.
- 5) **Ensure the right policies are in place.** Consider developing a simple volunteer policy, volunteer agreement and an induction pack. This will help to outline roles and responsibilities.

It's important to have strong volunteer management processes and procedures in place. It helps with health and safety, it protects councils financially but also makes it easier to retain and attract volunteers.

5.b. Risk assessment template

We have included a generic risk assessment template which can be found at the end of this guide. This can be printed off and used during the outbreak. If you would like a separate PDF copy, please do get in touch by emailing us at insurance@bhbcouncils.co.uk.

5.c. Arranging insurance for your volunteers

If individuals in the community are setting up a group, they should consider the types of insurance cover needed to protect their volunteers. The group could potentially be left vulnerable without the correct cover in place. Even with the best of intentions, accidents can happen!

The types of insurance available to protect volunteers include:

- **Employers' liability insurance** – this provides cover for the group if a member of staff or volunteer is harmed whilst carrying out their duties. If a council has taken out employers' liability insurance, volunteers should also be covered under this policy, although they should always double-check under the Employers' Liability section of their insurance policy.

- **Public liability insurance** – this covers the group and the volunteers against any accidental injuries or any damage that is caused to the public or their property.
- **Cyber insurance** – this covers volunteers if they accidentally share confidential data. It also covers data breaches and hacking.

Please note: Volunteers acting on behalf of the parish council should be covered by the parish council public liability insurance. Please check with your broker or insurance company.

5.d. Insuring your Local Council and Volunteer group with BHIB

BHIB Councils Insurance specialise in providing insurance broking services for parish and town councils. As part of our wider BHIB offering, we also specialise in providing affordable insurance broking services for charities and voluntary groups. We can provide groups with bespoke policies including cover for volunteers.

To find out how we can help councils or voluntary organisation, email us at insurance@bhibcouncils.co.uk or call **0330 013 0036** to speak to one of our friendly team.

Please note: Councils may need to adapt their volunteer management processes during the coronavirus outbreak. Please get in touch with us if you have any questions.



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Risk Assessment



NOTE: Before completing this risk assessment please see guidance notes towards the end of the document.

Date:	
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Assessors Name:		Reference Number:		Review Date:	Ongoing – as per government guidance updates
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Endorsed By:		Signature:		Position:		Date:	
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Description of assessment	Coronavirus (COVID-19)
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Location Details	
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Identified Hazards	Who may be affected	Risk Level before control measures S x L = R				Existing control measures	Additional Control measures required	To be actioned by	Completion date	Final Risk level S x L = R			
		S	L	R	RR					S	L	R	RR
Catching / Spreading	Employees, client, public	5	3	15	H	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Welfare facilities will contain suitable levels of soap and antibacterial gel. Employees will be asked to wash hands with soap regularly and thoroughly, for at least 20 seconds. Tissues will be provided for all employees. Employees should use their tissues when coughing or sneezing and then place the used tissue in the bin before washing hands. Contact with personnel suspected of having caught COVID-19 will be avoided. 				5	1	5	M

Risk Assessment



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Identified Hazards	Who may be affected	Risk Level before control measures S x L = R				Existing control measures	Additional Control measures required	To be actioned by	Completion date	Final Risk level S x L = R			
		S	L	R	RR					S	L	R	RR
Catching / Spreading (continued)	Employees, client, public	5	3	15	H	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employees are reminded to not touch their eyes, nose or mouth if their hands are not clean. A cleaning schedule will be implemented throughout the site, ensuring that worksurfaces, door handles, taps etc. are all thoroughly cleaned with an antibacterial cleaning substance. We will also work towards any cleaning / infection control requirements outlined by the client. Employees will be told to self-isolate for 14 days should they find they have a new, persistent cough and/or a high temperature. Should employees disclose that personnel living with them are self-isolating, they should be encouraged to do the same for 14 days as per Government guidance. 				5	1	5	M

Risk Assessment



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Identified Hazards	Who may be affected	Risk Level before control measures S x L = R				Existing control measures	Additional Control measures required	To be actioned by	Completion date	Final Risk level S x L = R			
		S	L	R	RR					S	L	R	RR
Employee travel plans	Employees, client, public	5	3	15	H	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We will ask employees to inform us if they are leaving the country. We will provide relevant government guidance in line with the area / country that they are visiting. Self-isolation will be enforced in line with the area / country guidance. 				5	1	5	M
Lack of awareness	Employees, client	5	3	15	H	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The latest government campaign posters will be displayed in the welfare areas and in suitable places around site. Toolbox talks will be carried out for all personnel on site, warning them of the risks posed by the virus as well as the control measures outlined in this assessment and from government guidance. This will include informing personnel of the known symptoms. We will continually adopt and review new government / WHO guidance as and when it is available. 				5	1	5	M

Risk Assessment

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Guidance Notes

SEVERITY	5	5	10	15	20	25
	4	4	8	12	16	20
	3	3	6	9	12	15
	2	2	4	6	8	10
	1	1	2	3	4	5
		1	2	3	4	5
	LIKELIHOOD					

LIKELIHOOD	
5	Almost Certain – Very High Risk
4	Probable – High Risk
3	50/50 – Medium Risk
2	Improbable – Low Risk
1	Almost impossible – Low Risk

SEVERITY	
5	Fatality – Very High Risk
4	Severe incapacity – High Risk
3	Absent 3 weeks – Medium Risk
2	Absent less than 1 day – Low Risk
1	Insignificant – Low Risk

1–4 LOW	5–9 MEDIUM	10–15 HIGH	16–25 VERY HIGH
Continue with existing control, however monitor for changes. Implement any additional control measures required, within the timescales given in the risk assessment.	Requires attention to reduce the rating as well as regular ongoing monitoring. Implement any additional control measures required, within the timescales given in the risk assessment.	Requires immediate attention to bring the risk down to an acceptable level. Implement the control measures required, within the timescales given in the risk assessment and continue to review working practices to reduce the probability of an accident to the lowest possible level.	Stop immediately – the risk is too high. Take immediate action to reduce the risk to the lowest level possible.

Risk Assessment



NOTE: Before completing this risk assessment please see guidance notes towards the end of the document.

Additional comments:

1. This risk assessment needs to be discussed with employees before they operate the plant/equipment to ensure compliance with all control measures through their understanding
2. Employees are to sign an acknowledgement sheet for their understanding of this risk assessment
3. The risk assessment is to be reviewed on an annual basis, or sooner if changes are made to the plant or working practices, or after an accident/near miss
4. This risk assessment must be approved by the nominated person for health and safety before being issued as a live document

Assessor 1 name:		Signature:		Date:	
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Assessor 2 name:		Signature:		Date:	
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Risk Assessment

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I, the undersigned, have been fully briefed on this risk assessment and other control measures in place to reduce the risk of injury to the lowest possible level. I fully understand my duties as an employee, to follow the control measures in this risk assessment and the method statement.				
Employee name	Job description	Date	Employee comments/recommendations	Signature