

CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)



PROTOCOLS

For Councils who engage Voluntary and Community organisations in regulated activity with adults

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DfC

Department
for Communities
www.communities-ni.gov.uk

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Context

COVID-19 had brought unprecedented changes to the way we deliver services and support the public and in particular, District Councils have played a key role in coordinating the local support to those who need it most.

The voluntary and community sector were quick to respond, supported by people making themselves available as this emergency situation evolved. Without them Councils could not have provided the level of support to those most vulnerable in our society.

The credibility and accountability of responding organisations in protecting the most vulnerable was necessary in sustaining public confidence and engagement. Keeping everyone safe remains a key message as the response to COVID-19 continues over the coming months and possibly even longer. As we look at the need to continue vital services on a longer term basis, we all need to ensure people are supported and that we are satisfied good practice is being adhered to, both in terms of effective recruitment of volunteers and the safeguarding of the vulnerable.

This is particularly important in roles that are defined as regulated activity. The Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (NI) Order 2007, as amended by the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012 defines **'regulated activity'** with children and adults. Regulated activity is work which a barred person

must not undertake. It is a criminal offence for a barred person to seek or undertake work from which they are barred, and it is an offence for organisations to 'knowingly employ' a staff member or involve a volunteer in regulated activity if they are barred.

There are six categories of workers that fall into the definition of regulated activity relating to adults (note this is different when working with children and young people).

The category that is relevant during the current COVID-19 situation is "Assistance with General Household Matters" which included helping a person with their cash, paying bills or carrying out shopping on their behalf because of their age, illness or disability".

This Protocol outlines the guidance for Councils engaging with voluntary and community organisations where volunteer's roles include carrying out activities for people in the community where money is involved, as this meets the definition of regulated activity.

The Department is recommending that a clear written agreement is in place about the nature of the engagement between the Council and the voluntary and community organisation in terms of responsibilities of each party. Councils may also wish to consider the appropriateness of holding a central list of volunteers specifically to meet their requirements in relation to regulated activity with adults, complying with GDPR.

Responsibilities

The Department for Communities is asking that Councils ensure the following responsibilities are met when engaging groups to carry out tasks on their behalf.

- Groups must demonstrate to Councils that they have taken steps to ensure suitable volunteers are selected for all roles - this involves getting basic contact details, checking out motivations and health information. Good practice suggests that references can also be helpful in gaining additional information about suitability.
- Groups must show how they have risk assessed the roles and considered how to mitigate against risks. See: [Risk assessment template](#)
- Groups must be aware that a role that involves handling money for vulnerable people cannot be carried out by a person who has been barred from working with adults. There is eligibility for an enhanced level disclosure with barred list check through Access NI. See **Appendix 1**. During COVID-19 crisis a facility has been agreed for a fast check against the barred list with the full enhanced disclosure being carried out at a later date.

Further information can be found [DOJ COVID-19 Safeguarding issues for community volunteers](#) and also [Access NI Application links](#)

- Groups need to demonstrate they have taken steps to only assign tasks that fall under the definition of regulated activity to individuals that they have approved to do so.
- A briefing is provided for all volunteers which includes full guidance on infection control, including where necessary provision of PPE. See: www.publichealth.hscni.net/news/covid-19-coronavirus
- A briefing is provided to all volunteers on how to carry out the role, with guidelines around safe procedures for handling cash where this activity cannot be avoided. Volunteers should be made aware they must NOT under any circumstances accept credit/debit cards, PIN numbers, or details of these from the people they are supporting. Some further tips and additional guidance about handling cash and making safer payments can be found in **Appendix 2**.
- Councils should ensure a commitment to good safeguarding practice is in place, volunteers are trained and clear procedures are available and communicated, in particular for reporting and recording concerns, incidents and accidents. [COVID-19 Keeping Children and Adults Safe Factsheet](#)

- Councils should ensure procedures for GDPR are adhered to where personal details are being distributed. See: ico.org.uk/global/data-protection-and-coronavirus-information-hub/
- Practical matters like reimbursement of out of pocket expenses have been addressed. [Expenses Form Template](#)
- Groups should provide evidence to the Council that they have insurance in place for carrying out this work.
- Councils should also ensure there is support for volunteers on:
 - how to carry out the role,
 - fatigue management and,
 - the volunteer's emotional wellbeing.

Having a named person to check in with volunteers to find out how things are going and how they are feeling is recommended.

More information can be found at:
[PHA COVID-19 - Resources for councils and community responses](#)

Additional Information and Resources

For more detail on **considerations for organisations** see:

www.volunteernow.co.uk/app/uploads/2020/05/Involving-Volunteers-Covid-19.pdf

For **generic guidelines for volunteers** see:

www.volunteernow.co.uk/app/uploads/2020/06/Volunteer-Guidelines-When-Volunteering-Covid-19.pdf

For more detail on **Keeping Adults Safe** see:

www.volunteernow.co.uk/

Appendix 1

Minimum practice in relation to police record checking when engaging volunteers in regulated activity with adults during COVID-19

For regulated activity, a group can ask a volunteer the following question:
Have you ever been barred from working with adults at risk?

Yes

It is an offence to involve them in regulated activity - do NOT recruit them.

No

As an additional measure a group can ask about previous Access NI applications (even completed for other organisations). Access NI checks are not portable but may provide information on this occasion.

The role is eligible for an Enhanced Level Disclosure with check against the Barred List. Access NI have introduced a fast tracking service against the Barred List. For details see:
www.justice-ni.gov.uk/publications/covid-19-guidance-relation-safeguarding-issues-community-volunteers

Appendix 2

Guidance on Money Issues

A. Tips for volunteers on dealing with money (eg doing shopping for others) are as follows:-

- Arrange the time you are going to call and ask the person to have cash ready in an envelope
- When you are outside ring and ask them to put the envelope outside their door reminding them that they then need to go back inside before you can approach
- Check envelope contents before leaving, taking a picture on your phone is helpful
- When you have completed the shopping take a photograph of the receipt before putting it in the envelope with the change
- When you return to their house please leave the shopping and envelope holding receipt and change in the agreed place and then call them to let them know. Please step well back while they retrieve their shopping
- Some older people may wish to give you a tip as a way of showing their appreciation, we would ask that you thank them for their generosity but explain that as a volunteer you cannot accept and that their thanks is all that is needed
- Volunteers must not accept requests to use credit or debit cards on behalf of the person including for payment of goods or withdrawal of money.

- People should be encouraged to use pre-paid cards or cheques as alternative methods for safer payments.

UK guidance at [Payment options for shopping when people are isolating](#)

B. Guidance on how people can access cash and make safer payments

See UK guidance at www.ukfinance.org.uk/covid-19-making-payments-safely-lockdown

Access To Cash from bank accounts.

Banks are offering a range of support for those over 70 and those that are shielding for medical reasons, with many of them providing a dedicated helpline. Those impacted should contact their bank to discuss the options.

- **Ulster Bank** - 0800 092 4238, 8am - 8pm, 7 days a week.
- **Bank of Ireland** - 0800 783 8591, 9.30am-4.30pm Monday-Friday
- **Allied Irish Bank** - 0345 646 0319, 9am - 5pm Monday - Friday
- **Danske Bank** - 0345 601 0089, 8am-8pm Monday- Friday, 9am-5pm Saturday-Sunday. A dedicated phone line for their older customers.

Access to benefit and pension payments for Post Office Card Account

The Department has put in place support to assist Post Office card account customers who are unable to access their benefit or pension payments during the Coronavirus pandemic. Options include:

- switching to a bank account,
- setting up a permanent agent or appointee to collect their money on their behalf or,
- issuing a voucher payment via SMS/ email to a trusted friend to collect their money for them.

A single point of contact has been established within the Departments to receive referrals from the NI COVID-19 Community Helpline as below:

0808 802 0020

Available in alternative formats



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