

COVID19 Community Response – A Guide for Voluntary and Community Groups

We have seen an amazing community response in Warrington with many, many community groups and individuals wanting to volunteer their time to help others in our communities who may need support due to illness or self-isolating.

Such has been the response that we would urge anyone considering setting up a new group to check what else is already out there before forging ahead. It may well be that there is already a group or several groups in your area who you could get involved with. By checking first, and potentially joining up with another group, you can help avoid duplication and competition for resources, and collectively we can make the biggest difference by working together. Contact Warrington Voluntary Action on 01925 246880 or email info@warringtonva.org.uk for information on groups already operating in your area.

However, if you are you an existing community group who has expanded or been mobilising your volunteers to help others in your community during the COVID19 crisis, or you have already set up a new community group in your local area to support those in need of assistance, the following information contains some important points to consider and useful links to sources of help and support. **If you haven't already done so, please register with Warrington Voluntary Action (WVA) to be added to the list of charities or community groups currently providing support to residents.** info@warringtonva.org.uk or call 01925 246880

WVA is also co-ordinating a list of individuals who want to volunteer. **To sign up, please complete their online form** <https://www.warringtonva.org.uk/covid-19-community-volunteer-sign> or call 01925 246880, Monday-Friday 9am-5pm.

Safety of Volunteers

First and foremost we all want to ensure that the volunteers who are giving up their time to help those in need are kept safe and well themselves.

The most important thing you can do to keep volunteers safe is to make sure they are following the government's recommended social distancing and handwashing behaviours. <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>.

Volunteers should not be from those groups who the Government say should be self-isolating. This includes anyone aged over 70, or with a complex health condition, including those:

- Who have received an organ transplant and remain on immunosuppression medication
- With cancer who are undergoing active chemotherapy or radiotherapy
- With cancers of the blood or bone marrow such as leukaemia at any stage of treatment
- With severe chest conditions such as cystic fibrosis or severe asthma
- With severe kidney disease requiring dialysis

It has also been identified that smokers are more likely to be at increased risk of developing serious respiratory disease if they contract COVID19. Therefore, it is suggested that smokers seriously consider not volunteering and certainly should not smoke whilst volunteering to protect others.

In addition, volunteers who are collecting shopping or other items for isolating individuals should be advised where possible to leave items on the doorstep to be collected by the isolating person rather than entering the home. This protects both the volunteer and the person they are helping.

If they have no choice but to enter someone's home, there are some things they can do to keep themselves and the isolated person stay safe.

- Stay more than two metres away from each other – ideally in a separate room.
- Do not touch any surfaces if possible.
- Spend as little time in the home as possible.
- Wash your hands or wipe with hand sanitiser as soon as you leave the premises.

Remember, your volunteers should always tell another person where they are and where they are going to. Regularly check in with your volunteers to make sure they are OK.

A leaflet outlining some basic “do’s and don’ts” for volunteers is available on the council’s Community webpage at <https://www.warrington.gov.uk/coronavirus-community-support-and-volunteering>.

There is also a range of useful information on working with volunteers during COVID19 available on Warrington Voluntary Action’s webpage <https://www.warringtonva.org.uk/support-community-groups-during-covid-19>. This includes a downloadable volunteer handbook, a volunteer risk assessment and links to online training.

PPE or Personal Protective Equipment

There has been a lot of coverage in the media regarding availability and correct use of personal protective equipment (PPE).

Current government guidelines highlight that social distancing and regular handwashing for at least 20 seconds with soap and warm water remain the most effective things people can do to protect themselves and others.

Public Health England guidelines state that PPE should only be used when providing **direct care (within 2m)** of someone who either has a possible or a confirmed case of COVID19 (the only definition of a possible case is a new continuous cough and temperature) or when providing **direct care** to someone in the government’s “shielded” group.

Local volunteers should not be providing this level of direct, close contact care and therefore additional PPE is not required. Volunteers should be advised to maintain social distancing and to wash hands regularly, especially after handing over items/dog leads/exchanging money etc. Where possible wash items with disinfectant before handing over.

Safeguarding of Vulnerable People

All vulnerable adults have the right to be safe, happy and healthy and deserve protection from abuse. Adult safeguarding is:

- The function of protecting adults from abuse or neglect
- The need to protect certain people who may be in vulnerable circumstances

If you or any of your volunteers have concerns that someone is either suffering from abuse or neglect or is extremely vulnerable and isolated and potentially in need of additional support, it is important that these concerns are raised with Warrington Borough Council so that suitable help can be put in place. Remember, the council and other statutory partners have a duty of care to vulnerable people but that care can only be put in place if we are aware there is a need for it. Concerns should be raised by calling 01925 443322.

You do not need the permission of the person you are referring if you believe they are in need of safeguarding support.

The government has provided information on safeguarding and DBS checks during the coronavirus outbreak on the following link.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/safeguarding-factsheet-community-volunteers-during-covid-19-outbreak/safeguarding-and-dbs-factsheet-faqs>

There is also useful information available in the handbook on Warrington Voluntary Action's website <https://www.warringtonva.org.uk/support-community-groups-during-covid-19> .

There is also a very good video available for volunteers on YouTube, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HHQG8CJROhU&feature=youtu.be>

Most community-based volunteers will not be in direct contact with people during this time, and therefore will not require a DBS check. However, it is important to check Government guidance to be sure. If you aren't sure, please contact Warrington Voluntary Action for advice.

Scams

We are aware that, unfortunately, a small number of unscrupulous individuals may be taking advantage of the current situation with COVID19 to try and scam vulnerable people. We therefore ask that if volunteers in your organisation have contact with isolated or vulnerable people, they remain alert for the possibility of scams and if they have concerns to report these to Trading Standards on 0808 223 1133.

More information on COVID19-specific scams can be found on the friends against scams website https://www.friendsagainstscams.org.uk/article/505/beware_of_covid_19_scams

Emergency Food Parcels and Food Handling

The Government has arranged for people who have been identified as being on the shielded list to receive food parcels containing staple foods directly from food suppliers.
<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus-extremely-vulnerable>

There are also a number of charities and statutory organisations that are providing food parcels to local people.

- Warrington Borough Council has set up a new Safe and Well service, which provides support and reassurance for those people who are unable to leave their home and have no family, friends, or appropriate support network. Safe and Well will provide essential items, such as food and prescriptions. Information on how to access the services is available at <https://www.warrington.gov.uk/help-and-support-vulnerable-people-coronavirus>.
- Warrington Food Bank continues to operate and provide vital food top-ups to those who are most in need. <https://warrington.foodbank.org.uk/get-help/>
- There are other well-established local community groups who work with the food bank to ensure those in greatest need are able to access food.

All of these local services have processes in place that support people with immediate supplies, but also ensure they are linked to other services that can help vulnerable people over a longer period of time. For example, Citizens Advice who can provide advice on how to access benefits. Or helping an isolated person to access online or telephone food orders and deliveries.

It is important people are given the right advice and support to become independent over a longer period of time and do not become dependent on food parcels.

Information about local services can be found at <https://www.mylifewarrington.co.uk>

New groups who are interested in providing a similar service are encouraged to contact Warrington Voluntary Action in the first instance for advice in case it is possible for them to link into existing provision (thereby avoiding duplication and ensuring a joined-up approach).

However, if you already have a provision up and running there are some basic things you should and shouldn't do:

- Make sure your work area is regularly cleaned. This should include the clothing worn by volunteers.
- Regularly wash hands using Government guidelines.
- Avoid any potential cross-contamination of foods. This is best achieved by only using food that is kept in packaging. We recommend you do not provide a food parcel to anyone with a life-threatening food allergy.
- Check 'use by' dates on food – if an item is past its use-by date, dispose of it.
- There is currently no government guidance which states that food needs to be quarantined before it is distributed. Indeed whilst this may be possible for non-perishable food such as tins/rice/pasta, it is not practical for perishable items such as salad, fresh fruit and veg, meat and milk. Therefore we are **not** advising groups who are distributing food to quarantine it first.
- Try and provide a healthy balance of food items in any parcel you provide.

- Do not allow volunteers who are showing any symptoms of COVID-19 or other illnesses such as sickness or diarrhoea to help.

The Food Standards Agency has recently published guidance on 'Food Safety for Community Cooking and Food Banks' <https://www.food.gov.uk/safety-hygiene/food-safety-for-community-cooking-and-food-banks>

There is some useful guidance on food handling for small businesses at <https://www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/safer-food-better-business>

There is specific guidance for food businesses during COVID-19 at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-food-businesses/guidance-for-food-businesses-on-coronavirus-covid-19>

Arranging Payments to Cover Costs of Shopping or Prescriptions

Volunteers should not allow those they are helping to share details of their debit card or PIN with them for the purpose of purchasing shopping or other items. Ideally if collecting shopping for someone, volunteers should buy the shopping sticking to a pre-agreed amount, obtain a receipt which can be shared with the person they are helping who then makes an online bank transfer for the amount.

Supermarkets, banks and the Post Office are also coming up with new ways to allow trusted family and friends to do shopping or access cash for isolating people. For example, some supermarkets have e-cards or gift cards that can be bought online. For example:

- <https://cards.asda.com/volunteer>
- <https://www.morrisons-corporate.com/media-centre/corporate-news/volunteer-buying-your-groceries-send-them-an-egift-or-gift-card/>

Check with the isolating person what options they might have – for anyone with internet access there are lots of ways of ordering and paying for goods online. Most people can also contact their bank via telephone to transfer funds. Some local shops will also do an over-the-phone payment option (though the larger supermarkets do not do this).

Paying with cash should be a last resort, but if unavoidable, both parties should then immediately follow handwashing/sanitising guidelines.

However, for those few people who cannot use these options, and are struggling to access cash or other ways to pay for goods and services, please advise them to call the council's Coronavirus helpline on **01925 442441** or **01925 442443**.

Data Protection: Your Legal Obligations

As your group starts to support vulnerable people into the community, it is likely that you will need to handle personal information about the people you are supporting, the volunteers you are working with and, sometimes, share it with others.

Data protection law is a set of standards that aim to ensure personal information is handled responsibly. It is important that you only collect the data and personal information you need to carry out your role. Think about the impact on a vulnerable person if their information is lost or stolen then take steps to prevent that happening, such as locking it away when not in use, communicating securely, using strong passwords and keeping security software up to date.

You should take steps to ensure people are not openly sharing their information on social media platforms such as Facebook. This leaves them vulnerable to scams.

However, there may be occasions when not sharing information could do more harm than good. For example, if there are concerns around safeguarding or if there is a need to notify the local council about vulnerable, isolated residents. Under these circumstances, you should share information. Remember, organisations such as local Councils, GPs and other statutory bodies have a duty to help and protect people. But they can only do this if they know someone needs help.

The link below to an article from the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) gives a quick and easy overview of the key things to consider. <https://ico.org.uk/about-the-ico/news-and-events/blog-community-groups-and-covid-19/>

Maintaining Resilience and Mental Wellbeing

Take care of your own health and mental wellbeing and pace yourself (this goes for group co-ordinators and volunteers you may be working with). This is a new situation but it may continue for some time so take time for yourself, then you can continue supporting those who need it over the coming months. Information is available at [MIND](#) and the local website [Happy OK Sad](#). A new "Be Kind to Your Mind" campaign has also launched across Cheshire and Merseyside including Warrington and aims to support people by providing a suite of mental and physical wellbeing resources, available on the www.kindtoyoumind.org website.

Some key advice, however, is to ensure:

- You stay connected with friends and family, either by phone, via online social media and video calling or even by old fashioned letter!
- Try to ensure you get some physical activity every day. Being active is a great stress buster so going for a (socially distanced) walk in the fresh air, doing activities in your garden or within the home such as yoga, a guided online workout or even freestyling your own dance routine in the kitchen will all help you and your volunteers to maintain wellbeing and stay resilient.
- Keep your mind active – by reading, doing puzzles, learning a new skill, playing cards or a board game, doing some crafting, playing a musical instrument or anything else that engages your interest! This will also help maintain good mental wellbeing.

It may well be that members of your community group have a range of hidden talents they may be happy to share with the rest of the group from a distance so get creative!

Funding

It is important to stress that **no-one should be spending their own personal money on supporting vulnerable people** unless they are doing this in the clear knowledge that it is a donation that they are happy and can afford to give or there is an agreement that this will be paid back by the person they are supporting.

Many groups will not require additional funding as much of the support that is needed may be simply checking on neighbours, co-ordinating locally around the collection of shopping/prescriptions etc. However, for those groups who are undertaking work that will generate some costs, support is available through organisations such as The National Lottery Community Fund and Cheshire Community Foundation in terms of funding the COVID19 effort. More information is emerging all the time and we advise contacting Warrington Voluntary Action for advice and support 01925 246880 or email info@warringtonva.org.uk

Groups should be aware that the council has not received any additional funding for this element of the COVID19 effort and will therefore be unable to fund any additional groups who are not already commissioned.

Key Links

<https://www.warrington.gov.uk/coronavirus-covid-19-warrington>

<https://www.warringtonva.org.uk/support/current-funding>

<https://www.warrington.gov.uk/coronavirus-community-support-and-volunteering>

<https://www.warringtonva.org.uk/support-community-groups-during-covid-19>