Staying safe guidelines for COVID-19 community response groups

If your group is not new, and has already got safeguarding arrangements in place, please use those.

If your group does not yet have formal safeguarding arrangements, this is intended be practical and pragmatic guidance to help you mitigate safeguarding risks for your volunteers and any vulnerable people that you are helping.

- Do not publicly identify those that are vulnerable or where they live

    No posters in windows, no other identifying marks on houses!

- Don't ask for details you don't need.

    Name, phone number and address is likely to be enough for most circumstances. This goes for volunteers too.

- Only share information with those that need to know

    Keep all personal information safely. Get permission from the person whose information it is to pass that information to the volunteer you will allocate to them.

- Keep physical contact to a minimum.

    There's no need for helpers to go into the houses of those they are helping. This will help with infection control as well as safeguarding. If someone you don't recognise is knocking on doors in your area, challenge them.

Where possible, keep things local:

Neighbours supporting neighbours is a wonderful thing and, at a time like this, shouldn't be discouraged. However, we do want to keep people safe. Most people are not fraudsters and we shouldn't be giving the impression to people that accepting help from neighbours is risky when it's not. It's probably the most sustainable and least bureaucratic way of supporting the general population over what may be a prolonged period.

Appropriate strategic coordination may be needed for those who are particularly vulnerable and especially those who need personal care. If you are helping your neighbours but they need extra help, use the contact details at the end of this guide to get advice.

It's probably neighbours who are best placed to spot and safeguard against potential criminals, abusers and fraudsters. So if you are helping your neighbours and notice something odd, please report it.

In less unsettled times, we would support groups to;

- put a safeguarding policy in place
- provide appropriate induction and training for volunteers, and provide support and supervision
- follow safer recruitment procedures including taking up of two references for each volunteer, and;
- where a DBS check is permitted for the role the volunteer will be doing, carry out that DBS check.

In current circumstances, we may not be able to do all of these things, because we need to mobilise volunteers quickly. Community groups can mitigate the risks by following these guidelines initially. For community groups that would like to develop their safeguarding arrangements further, full guidance is available on CVS website at https://www.cvsbeds.org.uk/safeguarding/

If your organisation can do an online DBS check, by all means do but if it doesn't come back quickly, you may not have the time to wait for it. As far as we are aware, there is no organisation willing or able to carry out the volume of DBS checks that will be needed, or that would pay the admin fees needed to do that. No organisation has published any guidance yet for this COVID emergency which covers risk-assessing of volunteer roles, what to do if a DBS does not come back completely clear, and what offences may or may not be appropriate to allow people to continue to be good neighbours nor what happens if the self-isolating person requesting support is a perpetrator or has a criminal record.

If you are doing DBS checks, there has been a helpful change to the ID checking requirements and the government guidance is here: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/covid-19-changes-to-dbs-id-checking-guidelines

The government have published a factsheet designed to address specific concerns that people involved in supporting their community may have at this time which is here:

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

Contact details - to discuss a concern or report abuse in Bedfordshire

If someone is at immediate risk of harm, contact the Police – phone or SMS text 999

If you are concerned about a **child or young person** under the age of 18, contact the NSPCC Helpline

- phone 0808 800 5000
- email help@nspcc.org.uk
- use the online form (will be read within 24 hours) https://forms.nspcc.org.uk/content/nspcc---report-abuse-form/

If you are concerned about a **vulnerable adult**, to report a concern or to get advice:

Bedford Borough Council:

- phone 01234 276222
- email adult.protection@bedford.gov.uk

Central Bedfordshire Council:

- phone 0300 300 8122
- email adult.protection@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk
- or, if the person you are worried about is not in immediate danger then you can report suspected abuse of an adult using the online form https://forms.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/officeforms/EF1204_Safeguarding_vulnerable_adults.ofml
- find out more about reporting a safeguarding concern to Central Bedfordshire Council at https://www.cvsbeds.org.uk/assets/cvs/files/2020/05VolunteerSafeguardingReferralGuideCB.pdf

Luton Borough Council:

- phone 01582 547730
- Email adultsafeguarding@luton.gov.uk

Out of office hours for all local authority areas in Bedfordshire:

- phone 0300 300 8123