

Factsheet 3: Use of volunteers to Support Communities

With the spread of COVID-19, we are being told that communities need to come together and support each other more than ever. Organisations that are used to relying on volunteers are in the best position for this. However, they also have a duty of care for their clients, volunteers, and staff.

Support Cambridgeshire has brought together some information to guide those organisations on how to use their volunteers and what their responsibility is.

Please be aware that these guidelines were created on 16 March 2020 in line with current government advice. Should anything change they may no longer be relevant. Please check with <https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/coronavirus-covid-19-uk-government-response>

Insurance

Before sending volunteers out under your organisation's name to support communities, make sure that you are insured to do so.

Risks

Complete a basic risk assessment before designing your support package. This should help you to identify what could go wrong and mitigate against it before it becomes a problem. Remember your staff won't necessarily be in the office to support as they normally would.

Suitability

Depending on your insurance, take into consideration the processes you normally would take when recruiting and make sure that those potential volunteers have gone through the needed checks. It might be a case of getting the most from your current volunteer pool rather than recruiting new ones.

Wellness

Make sure those volunteers are well enough to support communities; that they don't need to go into isolation nor are they in the at-risk category.

Expectations

In moments like this everyone wants to help, which means at times people put themselves in uncomfortable situations. Should anything happen this could put your organisation at risk. Therefore, make sure all your volunteers are aware of the expectations and that they are not required to do anything other than that task.

Task

Do you have the mechanisms in place to make sure tasks like shopping can be done effectively and safely? What else are you going to use your volunteers for – perhaps it's just phone calls? Is everyone in agreement for details to be exchanged?

Communication

Staff will most likely be working from home. Do they have a mobile and can this be linked with the office phone or given out to volunteers.

Keep in regular contact with all your volunteers, to check if they are OK, update them on any changes linked with government guidelines, keep informed if they are ill or need to self-isolate and make sure they don't feel they are responsible for any one individual.

Thank You

Remember to thank your volunteers. While everyone is in this together it doesn't cost anything and will keep spirits high.

Written on the 16th March 2020 by Hunts Forum.