

## Greater Manchester good practice guidance for involving volunteers in response to the Covid-19 crisis

### 1. Objective:

This paper provides good practice guidance around leading and involving volunteers in Greater Manchester (GM) in response to the Covid-19 crisis. It is intended for individual local authority areas to take up, use and adapt for their own arrangements.

This guidance has been developed by partners from across the public and VCSE sectors, led by the 10GM partners, and publicised across all sectors for use by those who are supporting volunteers across GM.

10GM thanks the Greater Manchester Combined Authority and the university of Manchester for its support in the development of this Guidance.

### 2. Introduction:

Across GM, there are many volunteers involved in the Covid-19 response including those from: neighbourhood, community and district-level arrangements set up in each of the 10 local authority areas, nationally-led volunteering agencies, local employers offering their staff, online tools gathering volunteers and volunteering opportunities, and also the new NHS Volunteers scheme. All are seeing a substantial interest in people wanting to help out as a volunteer.

NCVO<sup>1</sup> defines volunteering as *'any activity that involves spending time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit the environment or someone (individuals or groups) other than, or in addition to, close relatives. Central to this definition is the fact that volunteering must be a choice freely made by each individual.'*

*This can include formal activity undertaken through public, private and voluntary organisations as well as informal community participation and social action. Everyone has the right to volunteer and volunteering can have significant benefits for individuals.'*

The VolunteerGM<sup>2</sup> website directs users into the local authority arrangements by district. Each district has set up a network of community hubs and arrangements to register and assign tasks to local volunteers helping vulnerable people in GM communities.

### 3. Principles for volunteering:

It is important that we:

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/policy-and-research/volunteering-policy>

<sup>2</sup> [www.volunteergm.org](http://www.volunteergm.org)

- **Manage the volunteer effort so that it doesn't cause harm** – for example by spreading the virus or leaving vulnerable people open to abuse or exploitation.
- **Ensure that the volunteering effort does actually reach the most vulnerable people** and helps them.
- **Ensure effective co-ordination of the allocation of volunteering tasks across local and national systems** – specifically local emergency response volunteers, NHS Volunteers and volunteers from other businesses or national agencies. This should be carried out at a local authority level.
- **Enable a sustainable and well-resourced support infrastructure for volunteering** – Volunteers cannot do their jobs without support, guidance, and resources. The volunteering infrastructure provides this, but it is not free.
- **Keep people safe** – both volunteers, staff and the people that they are carrying out tasks for.
- **Value our volunteers** – give them a clear identity, look after their welfare and thank them for their effort.

The Cabinet Office has published Guidance about how to work with 'spontaneous' emergency response volunteers<sup>3</sup> which contains detailed advice based in research undertaken by the University of Manchester.

### 3. **Good practice guidance for involving volunteers in the response to the Covid 19 crisis**

The following good practice guidance is aimed at all the agencies involved in emergency response volunteering in GM in response to the Covid-19 crisis – Local Authorities, Volunteer Centres, other local and national VCSE organisations and NHS. It should be adopted through the emergency command structures put in place in GM.

The guidance has been drawn from discussions with the partners involved through the GM Humanitarian Aid Group, from acknowledged good practice already taking place in GM, and from guidance published by government and national volunteering bodies.

#### Leadership

Strong and effective leadership will be key to mobilising successful volunteering effort.

A Strategic Lead for humanitarian aid has been appointed in each of the 10 Local Authorities. It is suggested that there is also a **Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) leading the volunteering effort in each local authority area**, ideally from the Local Authority or VCSE volunteering coordination function. The SRO should be linked to a named person at each community hub in that locality. Given the infectious nature of the Covid-19 crisis, suitable deputies should be identified, potentially supporting across local authority areas.

**Appendix 1** contains Guidelines for SROs for involving volunteers in response to Covid19 written by the University of Manchester.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/planning-the-coordination-of-spontaneous-volunteers>

**Appendix 2** contains volunteering guidance developed by the Essex Local Resilience Forum, which includes a role description of the duties of a volunteering SRO.

### VCSE Partners

Any VCSE agency leading the volunteering effort should be properly resourced to:

- Receive expressions of interest from people wishing to volunteer
- Provide advice and guidance for people wanting to volunteer either formally with vulnerable people, or informally in their communities or with local charities and voluntary organisations
- Help people to find the right volunteering opportunity for them
- Provide information for people who want to help in other ways (eg making donations of goods or money)
- Maintain a web-based information service of offers of support

### Categories of volunteering

It is helpful to think about two distinct groups of volunteers at the current time:

- **Emergency Response Volunteers** – people who have registered with the local authority or volunteer centre, via the NHS App, or a national agency, have undergone the necessary checks, have received training and are able to utilise the correct PPE. These volunteers can be assigned to help people in the vulnerable groups (older people, disabled, people with underlying health conditions) and could phone people, or deliver food or medicines, for example
- **Good neighbour volunteers** – people who have offered to help in their local community, but who have not necessarily received any formal checks, training and who do not have access to PPE. These volunteers are asked not to help the most vulnerable people to prioritise broader support activity, but instead might such be asked to help by phoning up a neighbour or friend on a daily basis, helping pack food at food banks, or buying food for those who are self-isolating but not classed as vulnerable

Across the country, people are organising into informal groups of good neighbour volunteers in response to the COVID-19 outbreak in order to help and support people in their local area. These groups are often called ‘**mutual aid groups**’ and are a group of local people who organise informally to support one another and the needs of their local community. They are independent from any organisation or official body, and are led by local people who volunteer their time.

The groups often organise online either through Facebook or WhatsApp. Macc is leading on mutual aid work for 10GM and have published a range of resources for working with mutual aid groups<sup>4</sup>. Community Action Suffolk has published a toolkit for setting up a co-ordinated network of volunteers in response to Covid-19<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.manchestercommunitycentral.org/coronavirus-advice-and-resources/mutual-aid-groups>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.communityactionsuffolk.org.uk/community/>

### Co-ordination of volunteering opportunities and effort

It will be important to avoid duplication of effort and confusion for potential volunteers about the various routes into volunteering, as well as increasing the likelihood of virus transmission.

There are several new App based technologies available for rostering volunteers, as well as pre-existing online platforms, all of which can be used concurrently for volunteering to be helpful for as many people as possible.

However, the Apps are for direct co-ordination (matching a volunteer to a task), whereas many existing portals are about brokerage (recruiting volunteers and deploying them into organisations which need more pairs of hands). Co-ordination of volunteering effort needs a system which includes **BOTH** brokerage and assignment of individual tasks.

Furthermore, these should be linked into tracking of people in the vulnerable cohorts, as identified by the local authorities through their emergency response arrangements, to ensure that volunteers help those most in need. Volunteers themselves can put themselves in a position of vulnerability, and methods of support put in place.

Co-ordination also needs to manage the flow of volunteers, including safer recruitment, induction, training, support, etc. With the loss of so many volunteer co-ordinator roles in the last 10 years, this is a significant capacity issue across volunteer centres, and may require further investment / resourcing.

### Volunteer job roles

It is important that those co-ordinating volunteering effort in a place focus on the job roles that are needed – not just the scheme through which people volunteer. NCVO publishes guidance on writing job descriptions for volunteers<sup>6</sup>.

Job role descriptions which are in use across GM and elsewhere are attached as appendices and can be adapted for use across GM:

- **Appendix 3** – NHSE Check-in and chat volunteer
- **Appendix 4** – NHSE Community Response volunteer
- **Appendix 5** – NHSE NHS Transport volunteer
- **Appendix 6** – NHSE Patient transport volunteer
- **Appendix 7** – Shopping volunteer
- **Appendix 8** – Food bank volunteer
- **Appendix 9** - Good Neighbour volunteer
- **Appendix 10** - Call Centre volunteer
- **Appendix 11** – Food delivery volunteer
- **Appendix 12** – Social media volunteer

FareShare UK also publishes a range of volunteer role descriptions<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://knowhow.ncvo.org.uk/your-team/volunteers/recruiting/writing>

<sup>7</sup> <https://fareshare.org.uk/volunteer/>

## NATIONAL VOLUNTEERING SCHEMES

**NHS emergency responders.** [www.nhsvolunteerresponders.org.uk](http://www.nhsvolunteerresponders.org.uk)

Volunteering Matters<sup>8</sup> will undertake national coordination of NHS volunteers scheme. It should be noted that there are 4 opportunities for NHS volunteers to be:

- **Community response volunteers** who will be involved in “collecting shopping, medication or other essential supplies for someone who is self-isolating, and delivering these supplies to their home.”
- **Patient transport volunteers** who will support the NHS by driving discharged patients to their homes,
- **NHS transport volunteers** who will move equipment, supplies or medication between sites.
- **Check-in and chat volunteers** who will provide regular support calls to elderly people who are in isolation and at risk of loneliness.

NHS volunteers can work for both the 1.5m people identified as being ‘clinically vulnerable’ and also any other vulnerable person requiring the above forms of support.

**Appendix 13** contains the Guidance for referrals which has been published for NHS emergency response volunteers

There is also a range of other national bodies deploying volunteers across GM.

**Appendix 14** lists these and describes the status and offer from these volunteers.

### Volunteering and the law

NCVO – the national body for voluntary organisations has published its guidance on the law<sup>9</sup> and volunteers. This contains the basic description of volunteering in legal terms, and details good practice in role descriptions, induction, training and supervision.

‘**Volunteer**’ is not a term that is legally defined. In practical terms volunteering arrangements can vary greatly, from being very informal, to being part of a highly formal structure. What matters in legal terms is whether or not there is a contract between the organisation and its volunteers and, if so, what the consequences of this are.

Volunteer role descriptions should describe a job that is voluntary – in other words a person has offered to do it – and this includes being done at a time when the volunteer wants or can do the task. Job descriptions that require someone to be present for set hours it might be considered an employment contract due to the nature of the commitment.

Volunteers cannot be paid for their time in law – if they are, then they become ‘employed’. Only out of pocket expenses can be paid, and **Appendices 15 and 16** contain examples of expenses policies which can be adapted for use.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://volunteeringmatters.org.uk/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://knowhow.ncvo.org.uk/tools-resources/volunteers-and-the-law>

Specific advice on payments to volunteers can be found at the NCVO website<sup>10</sup>.

### Liability and Insurance

It is important that there is appropriate insurance cover for the work of all volunteers who are tasked by local authorities and partners.

Once the local authority or volunteer centre gives a task to a volunteer, that volunteer falls under the liability of that organisation, and government guidance is clear that insurance will be required. Local authorities should talk with their insurers about covering the liability of volunteers to whom they are assigning tasks.

Guidance is available on undertaking risk assessments for volunteering<sup>11</sup> from Volunteer Now, and a fact sheet is contained at **Appendix 17**.

### Volunteering under the 'stay at home' rules

The Government has stated that one of the exceptions to the guidance to stay at home are people needing to travel to provide care to others. "In other words, people can go out to volunteer if they are providing help to vulnerable people or if their volunteering cannot be done from home<sup>12</sup>." If you are deemed high risk – you are aged over 70 or have underlying health issues – there are volunteering opportunities that you can do by phone or computer from home. However, this guidance may change and be updated, so it's always worth checking with government for the latest position<sup>13</sup>.

### Safeguarding

Volunteers are placing themselves in the front line and will come into contact with people who may be suffering domestic abuse, neglect, or harm. **Appendix 18** contains guidance published by the Salford Adult and Children's Safeguarding Boards which can be adapted for use with volunteers and tells them about recognising and reporting signs of abuse and neglect.

It is important that volunteers realise that they have a role in safeguarding the people that they are helping.

### Operational criteria

Local authorities need a proportionate process for accepting offers of help.

Offers of support should not normally be accepted if the person flags issues in the DBS check, shows signs of possibly having caught Covid-19, is under the influence of alcohol or drugs, or is unable to be matched with any of the tasks which are required. Key to this process would be a risk assessment of the role required and the suitability of the person volunteering.

A well-being check should also be made about the status of the people that a volunteer is living with. People who have someone in their household who is vulnerable or who have

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<sup>10</sup> <https://knowhow.ncvo.org.uk/tools-resources/volunteers-and-the-law/employment-status>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.volunteernow.co.uk/publication/risk-assessment-volunteers/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/mar/27/coronavirus-and-volunteering-how-can-i-help-in-the-uk>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-how-to-help-safely--2/coronavirus-how-to-help-safely>

contracted the virus, should not be accepted as a volunteer because of the risk of transmission.

It is important that Emergency Response Volunteers have:

- A clearly defined 'role' and task to fulfil – with some form of 'rostering' via an App or volunteer centre
- Induction and / or training – including on 'social distancing' requirements
- De-briefing – giving thanks, taking their feedback, discussing what happened and how they felt doing the task
- PPE where appropriate to the task that they have been given
- DBS checks where appropriate to the task that they have been given
- Insurance - If they are driving their own car to deliver your foods (and claiming expenses for it) it will be important to confirm that they have car insurance, valid MOT, driving licence, etc.
- Roles that have been risk assessed (See **Appendix 19** for guidance from Volunteer Now on how to carry out risk assessments)
- A designated contact from whom they can get advice from if they have difficulties
- A Code of Conduct they must adhere to – which will allow you to reject volunteers who breach those codes with unsafe practices

**Appendix 20** contains a draft Code of Conduct for volunteers in Covid-19 provided by the University of Manchester. The Essex Guide (**Appendix 2** also contains a useful Code of Conduct).

### Identification

All volunteers should be provided with an official form of identification, so that staff know they are legitimate and should be taking the food parcels, so that police and shops know that they have an important role to play, and importantly so vulnerable people know they are tasked by the local authority or local community hub.

It is suggested that a letter or card is provided which includes a name and ID number, as well as a number to call and query the ID. This allows someone to cross-check the name with the number to see if the volunteer was a 'real' one or if the volunteer was an impersonator.

**Appendix 21** contains a letter of identification in use in Trafford. Elsewhere, the Lincolnshire LRF, for example, has issued pre-printed disposable wrist bands for volunteers. Kingston Council has issued a letter for key workers and volunteers which they were to carry with them plus a card with photographic identification. Torbay has a letter with their logo and the Council logo plus an endorsement from the local Police Commander which has been shared amongst staff. Also they have supplied them with a lanyard to display their driver's license as proof of identity. Each letter is personalised so can be checked against the identification if needs be.

### Purchasing items for others

**Appendix 22** contains guidance written by HOUR Manchester (MACC) for 'volunteers buying items for others'. This is aimed at mutual aid groups, and recommends that groups firstly consider whether or not they need to be doing shopping for others. It then offers recommendations on how shopping for others can be done safely and told them to avoid using cash and should never take others bank cards.

The Post Office has announced that it is extending its Payout Now scheme<sup>14</sup> which will allow volunteers to allow anyone who cannot leave home may be able to ask a trusted friend or volunteer to withdraw cash at any Post Office using a single-use voucher. The Post Office scheme is being extended and offered to all banks, building societies and credit unions. If the bank allows it, someone can ask for a one-time barcode sent via text, email or post for a stipulated amount. A trusted friend or volunteer can exchange the voucher for the cash requested. This scheme was previously set up for a named individual, such as a carer, to collect cash on someone's behalf.

This Post Office scheme offers a more structured and safe way to enable people to use cash to purchase items.

### Welfare of Volunteers

The welfare of volunteers is important, and consideration should be given to their briefing and debriefing, and how to identify/refer up concerns about a vulnerable person they are helping. Working with an established volunteer centre will ensure good practice and national standards are used.

It may also be important to have guidance on when/how to say 'no' to volunteers and stop their volunteering. This guidance will permit/authorise/protect those staff who feel in that position.

Support for volunteers with their mental wellbeing has been put in place through Connect 5 (the approved GM training course on supporting people to have conversations about their mental wellbeing). **Appendix 22** contains details of the mental health support offer which has been extended to new recruits at the GM Nightingale Hospital, which can also be shared and accessed by emergency volunteers across GM.

### Food standards

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) has refreshed its long-standing community cooking guidance<sup>15</sup> to reflect the welcome increase in individuals and community groups supplying vulnerable people with food during the coronavirus pandemic.

The guidance includes preparing or donating meals for:

- those in self-isolation due to coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms
- [vulnerable groups who are being shielded](#)
- community groups and local organisations
- NHS staff.

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.postoffice.co.uk/post-office-payout>

<sup>15</sup> [www.food.gov.uk/safety-hygiene/food-safety-for-community-cooking-and-food-banks](http://www.food.gov.uk/safety-hygiene/food-safety-for-community-cooking-and-food-banks)



Their advice is clear that it is very unlikely that people can catch COVID-19 from food. COVID-19 is a respiratory illness and not known to be transmitted by exposure to food or food packaging. FSA are continuing to work closely with partners across the food chain to ensure the UK food supply remains safe.

**Appendix 23** also contains the GM Regulatory Centre of Excellence guidelines on Food Delivery and Takeaway in the light of Covid-19.

GM Poverty Action has prepared a paper based in their experience coordinating the GM Food Poverty Alliance<sup>16</sup>, and in particular from several conversations with the largest VCSE sector providers during the COVID-19 crisis. This paper outlines a series of good practice recommendations that will help these partnerships to achieve their potential and is contained at **Appendix 24**.

### Monitoring and Evaluation

The activities of emergency response volunteers should be tracked – NHS Volunteers are tracked through the App, and there is an opportunity to roll out an App being developed in Bury across the whole of GM.

It will be important to ensure that there is a feedback / evaluation system so that we can gauge the impact of volunteers, and allow the cared for person to feed back on their experience. This will allow a vulnerable person who has had a bad/unshielded experience with a volunteer to report this.

Processes should be in place to:

- To track the delivery of activities by volunteers
- To monitor the effectiveness and efficiency of the arrangements as volunteer numbers increase and decrease
- To track DBS checking of volunteers where required
- To monitor the PPE needed for specific tasks, and ensure the availability of that PPE
- To maintain appropriate records and report on performance e.g. of number of vulnerable people, volunteers, tasks delivered, hours worked, feedback
- To evaluate the experience of vulnerable people from the activities of volunteers
- To evaluate the experience of volunteers

### Longer term Evaluation

One of the issues, for the future, may be assessing the performance of the volunteers. Tracking statistics via the App based technology will be useful for an evaluation programme of the impacts of volunteering across GM.

### Communications

Communication is required to provide clarity to both the public and volunteers. This work needs to promote a clear message that signposts volunteers in the city region to the VolunteerGM site with information to help manage expectations on what volunteers can

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<sup>16</sup> <https://www.gmpovertyaction.org/food-poverty-action-plan/>

expect. This should include information on what people can do if they are furloughed but want to volunteer.

It is important to ensure that:

- Recognition and reward to volunteers is applied equitably and effectively
- Processes are in place to communicate with volunteers including the contributions they have made to supporting vulnerable people
- At the end of their volunteering, volunteers are thanked and their feedback recorded
- Where necessary, volunteers are signposted towards official voluntary sector organisations for future volunteering opportunities

#### **4. Other Guidance**

**Appendix 25** contains a Toolkit for setting up a co-ordinated network of volunteers in response to the Covid-19 crisis, which has been published by Community Action Suffolk.

#### **5. Key contacts for this guidance are:**

Ben Gilchrist (Action Together) [ben.gilchrist@actiontogether.org.uk](mailto:ben.gilchrist@actiontogether.org.uk)

Duncan Shaw (University of Manchester) [Duncan.Shaw-2@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:Duncan.Shaw-2@manchester.ac.uk)

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