

COVID-19: Information for emerging local groups

We have been heartened by the support that has emerged in the last two weeks, from third sector groups, partners and local community groups. Engage Renfrewshire wish to recognise and applaud all the efforts undertaken by members across our communities.

However, we all still have a responsibility to keep ourselves and others safe. In fact, that responsibility is perhaps even greater than ever as we all find new ways to help each other.

Thinking about how best to ensure your support activities are carried out safely can be a bit daunting if you've never had to consider such issues before but don't worry: this document is here to help you!

It covers:

- What we mean by safeguarding and why it matters
- Advice on how to assess and then minimise risk
- Some simple tips on how to keep everyone safe when carrying out common support activities

It does NOT cover infection control. For further information on how best to prevent infection and spread then please continue to monitor the latest NHS Guidance by clicking on the following link; [NHS guidance](#)

What is meant by Safeguarding?

Safeguarding means protecting the health, wellbeing and human rights of everyone at risk, enabling them to live safely, free from abuse and neglect. It is about people and organisations working together to prevent and reduce both the risks and experience of abuse or neglect.

If an organisation works with or around children and vulnerable adults, having strict and sometimes complex safeguarding policies and procedures in place will be one of its top priorities and whilst everyone acknowledges the uncharted nature of what we are facing we all still have responsibility to be aware of potential risks and to take such measures as are possible to minimise them at all times, even when involved in an informal group rather than an established organisation. This document is intended to help you do that.

How do we assess risk?

The circumstances in which groups, both informal and formal, are operating, the nature of the support they offer and the challenges they face will vary hugely. Also, informal neighbourhood initiatives providing support to neighbours are not registered charities, and cannot be expected to have the same levels of protocols and policies. Despite this there are some basic steps which *everyone* can take to assess and minimise risk.

These steps are;

1. Identifying hazards
2. Assessing the risk of harm
3. Assessing existing control measures, to see if they are adequate
4. Assessing if extra controls are needed
5. Reviewing later on, to see if the controls are working

What, if any, legal responsibilities do we have?

The Protecting Vulnerable Groups (**PVG**) membership scheme is managed and delivered by [Disclosure Scotland](#). It helps ensure people whose behaviour makes them unsuitable to work with children and protected adults cannot do 'regulated work' with these vulnerable groups. For more information on what is meant by 'regulated work' please click on the following link: [Regulated Work](#)

In order to qualify for a PVG check, new volunteers would need to be carrying out a regulated work activity with children or protected adults regularly and as part of their normal duties with an organisation. As we are in the very early stages of self-isolation, it's currently not possible to determine if the activities will be regular or normal duties. Your organisation may also consider that the new services or increased provision is in response to a crisis / emergency situation (which would not require a PVG).

There are several support activities which definitely **do not require** a PVG check such as shopping, cash handling, having access to people's details and dog walking. Each organisation has to risk assess these activities and consider what other safeguarding measures are appropriate such as supervising new volunteers more closely.

Informal groups of neighbours coming together to support vulnerable people in their community are of course not covered by legislation which formal organisations are legally obliged to follow **but** it is still important that risk is assessed and such measures as are possible are taken to reduce risk.

We are doing shopping, what should we know?

Here's a few basic precautions for handling shopping that could help keep everyone safe. You may want to include these in your safeguarding practices;

- Don't go into any houses. Leave food / goods outside the doorstep.
Communicate to the person in isolation that you have delivered via message or phone call. Get confirmation that the person has received it before you leave.
- Check the safety of the products delivered. Check any packaging is sealed and the temperature of product on delivery e.g. If it's meant to be frozen, is it still frozen?
- Recommend that recipients wash shopping wherever possible and wash their hands after touching it.
- Remember to wash hands before and after deliveries. Where possible wash for 20 seconds with soap and water. When out and about keep a bottle of alcohol hand sanitiser to hand.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing and sneezing. If no tissue, cough and sneeze into the crook of your arm.
- Volunteers should ensure they have a low chance of becoming infected. Where possible follow social distancing protocol and don't take unnecessary risks.
- Public transport should be avoided where possible. In cases where taking public transport is unavoidable, disinfection of the items delivered should be carried out.
- Take care when handling any items which may be given to people who may have compromised immune systems. The virus can live on inanimate surfaces for up to 72 hours.
- Disinfect any surface that will be touched by the person you are delivering to.

We are picking up prescriptions, what should we know?

Some of the prescriptions that volunteers may end up collecting have a potentially high street value. This means that it's fairly likely people will want to steal them in order to sell them on. The danger of harm is likely to be high if someone doesn't receive the medication they need. This is thus a high risk activity and should only be done if these precautions are followed;

- Prescriptions should be picked up in pairs.

- ❑ Volunteers collecting prescriptions should message organisers when they have collected prescriptions.
- ❑ Volunteers should message organisers when they have delivered prescriptions.
- ❑ Organisers should message the requester to confirm they have had their delivery before deleting the request.
- ❑ If you collect a prescription, do not advise on doses, preparation or administration of medication even if you have a relevant qualification. This should only be done by the prescriber.
- ❑ The same is true of over the counter medications, such as paracetamol and ibuprofen. No advice should be given by volunteers, no matter what you've read. The person requesting over the counter meds must take all responsibility for their request. If over the counter then only buy and deliver the maximum amount which can be purchased by one person (ie only 16 paracetamols and not boxes and boxes. If they need boxes then this should be prescribed).
- ❑ Don't provide a panic buying service for paracetamols, nor pasta, nor anything.

We are dog walking, what should we do?

Primarily you should advise those using the service that volunteers will not have the same training & insurance as fully registered dog walkers. All owners recognise that they should share all relevant information regarding the dogs temperament and behaviours. Below are pointers for mitigating the risk of transferring the COVID-19 virus from or to a house that is completely self-isolating.

- ❑ Organise a suitable time & length of walk, ensuring the owner is aware of an expected return time.
- ❑ Volunteers should take their own lead and wear gloves when handling any coats or collars.
- ❑ Do not enter houses to collect dogs. The owner should send the dog out and the dog walker should clip the lead on.
- ❑ If walking a dog in an area where you may encounter another dog walker please take all precautions to maintain social distancing.
- ❑ When returning a dog the above procedure should be enacted in reverse; unclip the dog outside the house and the owner should call them in.

- ❑ Once you have returned the dog remove your gloves. Wash your hands with soap and water as soon as you return home.

Remember that general dog walking etiquette still applies. Many local areas have litter and dog fouling fines, please be considerate of these. If walking in a rural area please also remember to adhere to local codes; it is currently the lambing season for many farms and many areas request that dogs be kept on-lead during this time.

How do we keep people's personal details safe?

Formal organisations of all types have often very complex data protection policies and procedures in place to ensure they carry out all of their legal responsibilities. However even though informal groups supporting neighbours through this crisis do not have those legal responsibilities they do still have a duty to do what they can to ensure people's personal details are not shared inappropriately. You can do this by;

- ❑ Always considering carefully whether someone's details need to be shared before doing so. It's important that information is only ever available to those who really need it to provide support.
- ❑ Never publishing personal information on public forums such as social media. These forums can be a vital way to connect people at this difficult time but keep any personal information to controlled, private forums such as Whatsapp groups and even then only if necessary.

How do we keep everyone's money safe?

It is not appropriate for volunteers to accept credit/debit cards from people asking for help in order to buy resources on their behalf as this is a safeguarding risk.

To reduce the risk of fraud, we recommend that wherever possible you do your shopping and come back with a receipt before asking for money from people in self-isolation. We also recommend that volunteers not make purchases larger than £30 for any one person or family in self-isolation.

You should keep a central record of any payments made. There should also be a central record of any concerns raised in respect of payments, and make people aware of how they can raise a concern.

Where possible payments should be made by bank transfer or paypal to minimise the risk of passing on the virus, but if that's not possible then you can disinfect any cash you receive using soapy water.

What other support is available?

If you are an informal group there are real advantages to be had from connecting with larger local networks or organisations such as your local housing association, voluntary sector network, community council or large charity. These advantages include;

- benefitting from the experience of staff and volunteers with real expertise in delivering services to vulnerable people
- finding out more about what other services are available locally to further help the people you are supporting
- hearing quickly about any resources which may become available to support your efforts
- knowing who might be available to support your work if your group becomes unable to do so for some reason

Engage Renfrewshire is your local third sector interface (TSI) and has a membership of over 400 organisations, which include everything from registered charities to community groups and social enterprises.

If you have not done so already please get in touch to let us know about your group, you can email info@engagerenfrewshire.com or call 0141 887 7707.

If there are any issues rising in your community and you would like further guidance please get in touch using the details above.

You can also register for our daily e-alert which contains the latest information from local partners, national guidance and available resources. Head to www.engagerenfrewshire.com and use the widget on our homepage to sign up.

Credits/Additional information:

This information was adapted from a previous blog by [Volunteer Glasgow](#). Our sincere thanks to them for sharing it.

They collated materials & assistance from the following:

- <https://www.nationalfoodservice.uk/>
- [Volunteer Scotland Disclosure Services](#)
- [National Health Service](#)

Further reading on Safeguarding can be found from SCVO: [Safeguarding](#)

More information on active groups in Renfrewshire can be found here: [Renfrewshire Council Website](#)