

CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)



COVID-19 COMMUNITY RESPONSE PLAN

Enabling the Voluntary & Community
Sector response to COVID-19

April 2020



DfC

Department
for Communities
www.communities-nl.gov.uk



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Introduction

The warmth and energy of the grassroots community response to the outbreak of COVID-19 has been a steady, bright spot in an otherwise dark and worrying landscape. In a time of crisis the response of many has been “what can I do to help?” We want to know how we can help our neighbours and support our community.

Grassroots organisations have offered the framework and organisation for that help. New volunteers and local networks are working alongside experienced organisations in a massive collective effort, to make sure that everyone can get help or support when they need it. Community organisations are providing frontline support where it’s needed: delivering food, medicines and establishing regular contact. Voluntary sporting clubs are using their organisational skills and extensive memberships to tackle emergency challenges.

Working together has never been more important and the Department for Communities has been working closely with its partners in the Voluntary and

Community Sector and at the grass roots, in local government and across the Executive departments to support this community response.

The Department is providing central coordination, advice, guidance and funding to enable and support the response on the ground.

The Department is being guided by the Voluntary and Community Sector COVID-19 Emergencies Leadership Group, established by Minister Hargey on 20 March. This group brings together grassroots and regional organisations and will meet as frequently as necessary and for as long as it is needed.

The Department and its partners are taking a number of actions to coordinate, support and sustain the community response.

This document sets out the most up to date position and signposts to sources of further information and support to monitor as this situation develops.



1 Coordination of Efforts on the Ground

Community and Voluntary Sector leaders are being involved in decision making at all levels to tap into local knowledge and expertise, pool resources and complement local public services. The measures in place to limit the spread of COVID-19 are creating extreme disruption to normal life for everyone in society and we know that many vulnerable and isolated people will need help with everyday essentials, if they are to stay safe in their homes. People without family support will need their neighbours and their community. The Department and its partners are taking action to help join up efforts on the ground and put in place back up, so that efforts can be sustained over time.

Action 1: Establish Emergencies Leadership Group

Minister for Communities, Deirdre Hargey, established the Voluntary and Community Sector COVID-19 Emergencies Leadership Group on 20 March. This group brings together grassroots and regional organisations and will meet as frequently as necessary and for as long as it is needed. The Emergencies Leadership Group will support the Minister and departmental officials in designing and delivering the measures underpinning the Community Response to COVID-19.

FURTHER INFORMATION: Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action: www.nicva.org

Action 2: Establish a COVID-19 Community Helpline

The Department for Communities has worked closely with Advice NI to develop a dedicated Freephone 'COVID-19 Community Helpline' to provide advice, direction and connection into other support services. The Community Helpline is now running 7 days per week 9-5 and will move to 9-9 as both demand and capacity increases. To add to current capacity for call volumes, the Helpline will recruit volunteer staff, including redeployed Civil Servants working under the direction of Advice NI.

The COVID-19 Community Helpline was established to respond to the immediate and ongoing needs of people who have been advised by their GP to shield for 12 weeks, along with other elderly and / or vulnerable people.

The Helpline is linked in to a directory of local services being supplied and updated by local Voluntary and Community Sector Organisations. This directory is being used to provide a clear pathway for callers towards support in their area. The Helpline is connecting callers to a rich network of organisations that lead on support for 'Good Morning' contact services, mental health, children, older people, specific health groups, social care, befriending, volunteering, foodbanks etc. Community organisations are already providing frontline support to those



vulnerable or isolating: delivering food, medicines and establishing regular contact.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

Helpline: 0808 802 0020

Email: Covid19@adviceni.net

Text: ACTION to 81025

www.adviceni.net

Action 3: Work with Council Coordination Hubs

The Department for Communities has worked with local government Civil Contingencies Groups to identify and map the 'front-line' service that is being delivered by community organisations. Local government has established Coordination Hubs in each council area to link up and link into the community organisations which underpin statutory services in many places.

Councils will provide a coordination, response and reporting role, (in support of the Health and Social Care Trusts) linking with the range of expertise and capacity that exists across the voluntary and community sector groups, to provide community and social Support to identified "Vulnerable and Isolated Persons" (VIPs).

The Department and its other partners will work with the Coordination Hubs to pool resources, including information on local need to direct and co-ordinate efforts, especially in relation to the distribution of food parcels to those shielding and other vulnerable people who are in need and cannot access food.

FURTHER INFORMATION: Each council will be operating its own Coordination Hub and can be contacted directly for more detail on the local arrangements in place in each area.

www.communities-ni.gov.uk/articles/contact-your-council

Action 4: Create a directory of active community organisations

The Community NI website is being used as a central directory of active community and voluntary organisations working on the community response to COVID-19. The directory can be used to help organisations and individuals to identify support in their areas and to connect organisations together and pool resources. NICVA has contacted a network of almost 6,000 organisations to invite them to share their details on Community NI and strengthen the collective response on the ground.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

www.communityni.org/

Action 5: Coordinate the supply and delivery of emergency food parcels

The Department for Communities is providing emergency food parcels through the Council Hubs which will coordinate delivery to individual households. Vulnerable and isolated people who are unable to leave their homes and have no other means of accessing food, through families or other means such



as online food delivery, will be provided with a package of groceries and household essentials. We are working directly with each council area who will have a key co-ordination role with local community groups and volunteers.

This approach is being developed collaboratively, with all partners recognising the urgency of the situation. The response must be robust and will be scaled up depending on the duration, scale and geographic spread of the pandemic. The effort being coordinated by the Department and its partners will complement existing grassroots provision. People who have been advised by the GP to shield at home for 12 weeks will be given priority for the first phase of support.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

Helpline: 0808 802 0020

Email: Covid19@adviceni.net

Text: ACTION to 81025

www.adviceni.net

Action 6: Coordinate home delivery of prescription medications

The Community Development and Health Network is coordinating the effort between Community Pharmacy and the community and voluntary sector to ensure that vulnerable and isolated people can

continue to receive their medical supplies. People who have been advised to shield at home are being given priority for support. New guidelines have been developed for volunteers in collaboration with Volunteer Now and a standard operating process to be followed by all community and voluntary organisations involved in the delivery of medications is being agreed with the Health and Social Care Board.

FURTHER INFORMATION: Community Development and Health Network:
www.cdhcn.org

Action 7: Develop new resources to support psychological wellbeing in isolation

The Department for Communities, along with the Community and Voluntary Sector partners and other statutory agencies is developing additional information, materials, and good practice guides and supporting signposting to appropriate services for mental and emotional wellbeing. We are developing a comprehensive package of supports to address a range of specific needs and vulnerabilities and will include short, medium and long-term interventions.

FURTHER INFORMATION: Inspire Wellbeing:
www.inspirewellbeing.org



2 Encouraging and Supporting Volunteers

Many people have responded to the current crisis by offering help and getting involved. Volunteering is part of the fabric of our community and volunteer effort is making such a difference in this emergency. The Department for Communities is working closely with Volunteer Now to channel offers of help to the organisations and people most in need and support a safe and co-ordinated volunteer response, linking up with regional and grassroots organisations.

Action 8 - Increase volunteer recruitment and matching

Volunteer Now has launched a new online campaign **#HelpEachOther** to support those who wish to volunteer for COVID-19 related opportunities and also for those organisations who require the support of volunteers to deliver their services to those who need it most. People can register directly for an opportunity related to COVID-19 by clicking the pop-up campaign box.

All new volunteering opportunities to support those impacted by the crisis are being registered on Volunteer Now's new "Be Collective" platform. Roles are diverse and may include telephone befriending, undertaking light shopping, walking the dog or packing food hampers.

FURTHER INFORMATION: go to www.volunteernow.co.uk/volunteering/helppeachother/ or email helppeachother@volunteernow.co.uk

Action 9 - Produce new COVID-19 advice for volunteers

Volunteer Now has developed specific advice and good practice guidance for informal and formal volunteering during COVID-19. Key messages focus on staying safe and protecting both volunteers and those they will be working with.

FURTHER INFORMATION: www.volunteernow.co.uk/information-resources-related-to-covid-19/

Action 10 - Fast track screening process for new volunteers

Safeguarding and safety in the face of the virus are paramount. Volunteer Now are working with Access NI to identify a fast track background check for certain new volunteers. Some new groups or volunteers may be unaware that they are undertaking 'regulated activity' which requires screening and background checks to be completed. The department is supporting Volunteer Now to screen and vet new volunteers.



FURTHER INFORMATION:

www.volunteernow.co.uk/information-resources-related-to-covid-19

Action 11 - Mobilise our Sporting Infrastructure

Our Sporting Codes have also stepped forward to support the community during this emergency. The Department for Communities is working with SportNI, the NI Sports Forum and Sports Governing Bodies to bring together skilled and motivated volunteers

to support critical services; identify key resources such as sports grounds, halls and vehicles and; deliver key health and wellbeing messages through social media campaigns.

Governing Bodies have offered a range of facilities that have conference, kitchen, shower, changing facilities etc that can be used to assist where required.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

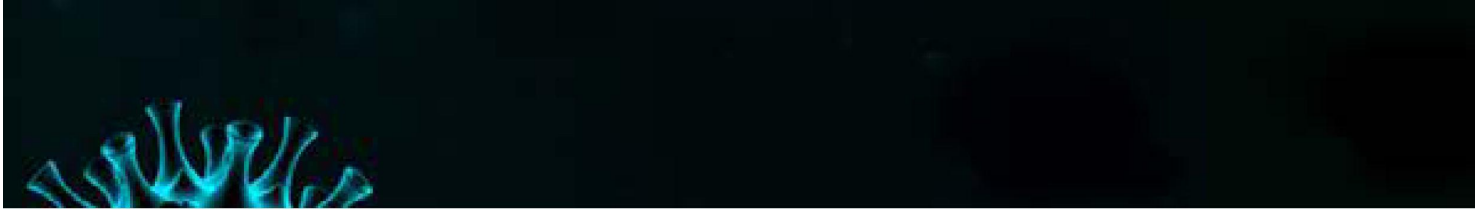
Tony Murphy Department for Communities
tony.murphy@communities-ni.gov.uk

3 Sustaining the Effort (supporting community organisations)

Community and Voluntary Sector organisations are experiencing the impact of this crisis at many levels: as service providers trying to respond to new challenges and needs; as social enterprises or charities adjusting to greatly reduced income; as employers trying to keep staff safe and respond to changing government rules and advice. Community and Voluntary sector organisations provide a regional and local infrastructure that is needed more than ever at this time.

Action 12 - Introduce flexibilities in grant funding

The Department for Communities has given assurances that grant funding flexibilities will be extended to all Voluntary and Community organisations funded by the department. Flexibilities include upfront payments to allow for the continuation of salary contributions in circumstances where employees are required to self-isolate. Other flexibilities allow for the re-prioritisation of resources and the re-direction of activities to support critical services.



This flexibility is also being adopted by other government funders and Minister Hargey has asked that all government departments follow her lead.

Action 13 - Maintain consistent information and advice

The Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA) is leading on communications between Voluntary and Community organisations and government during this period of crisis response. Regular and relevant updates for voluntary and community organisations on key developments are being provided via email, social media and on the NICVA website focusing on a number of themes: funding and fund raising; advocacy; employment and HR; and governance. The Department for Communities will work closely with NICVA to get clarity on how emerging government measures apply to Voluntary and Community organisations.

NICVA will be running funding clinics in the coming weeks covering information on current funding, fundraising, and new sources of financial help for voluntary and community organisations.

NICVA will continue to provide direct telephone advice to organisations on the impact on their workforce. This includes details regarding the Job Retention Scheme “furloughed workers” and how to claim wages, Home Working, and other government support measures including Charity Commission governance requirements. A series of webinars will be held in coming weeks to provide further support.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action: www.nicva.org
www.nicva.org/covid19

4 Funding

Additional resources are needed to support and sustain the Community Response to COVID-19. Work is ongoing to map the level of funding which will be needed, depending on the duration and intensity of the impact of the pandemic and the emergence of need on the ground.

Action 14 - Meet emergency funding needs for food supply

The Department for Communities will fund the provision of emergency food supplies and their distribution to local Council Hubs.

FURTHER INFORMATION:
www.communities-ni.gov.uk

Action 15 - Provide additional COVID-19 grant funding

The Department for Communities is providing extra money for grassroots, community-based responses which will be distributed via local councils under a COVID-19 Community Contingency Fund. This additional funding will be focussed on Food, Financial Need/ Poverty, and Connectivity.

The Department will be boosting its Regional Infrastructure Support Programme to support the increased workload being handled by organisations such as Volunteer Now and Advice NI.

The Department for Communities has given councils the flexibility to use their baseline Community Support Fund allocations to meet the needs of the voluntary and community sector in this crisis.

The Department for Communities has worked with the Community Foundation Northern Ireland to create a Coronavirus Community Fund offering grants of between £1k and £10k to community organisations working with people affected by COVID-19.

There is also work in development to understand and respond to wider funding pressures being experienced by the third sector in its widest sense, including those who have not traditionally been supported through government funding.

FURTHER INFORMATION:
www.communities-ni.gov.uk/articles/contact-your-council

CFNI communityfoundationni.org/grants/coronavirus-community-fund/

Summary of Actions and Key Information Sources

ACTION		MONITOR PROGRESS/ FIND OUT MORE
1	Establish Emergencies Leadership Group	www.nicva.org
2	Establish COVID-19 Community Helpline	Helpline: 0808 802 0020 ; Email: Covid19@adviceni.net ; Text: ACTION to 81025 ; www.adviceni.net
3	Work with Council Support Hubs	www.communities-ni.gov.uk/articles/contact-your-council
4	Create a Directory of active community organisations	www.communityni.org/
5	Coordinate the supply and delivery of emergency food parcels	Helpline: 0808 802 0020 ; Email: Covid19@adviceni.net ; Text: ACTION to 81025 ; www.adviceni.net
6	Coordinate home delivery of prescription medications	www.cdhn.org
7	Develop new resources to support psychological wellbeing in isolation	www.inspirewellbeing.org
8	Increase volunteer recruitment and matching	www.volunteernow.co.uk/volunteering/helpachother/ or email helpachother@volunteernow.co.uk
9	Produce new COVID-19 advice for volunteers	www.volunteernow.co.uk/information-resources-related-to-covid-19/



10	Fast track screening process for volunteers	www.volunteernow.co.uk/information-resources-related-to-covid-19
11	Mobilise Sporting Infrastructure	tony.murphy@communities-ni.gov.uk
12	Introduce flexibilities in grant funding	www.nicva.org
13	Maintain consistent information and advice	www.nicva.org/covid19
14	Meet emergency funding needs for food supply	www.communities-ni.gov.uk
15	Provide additional COVID-19 grant funding	www.communities-ni.gov.uk/articles/contact-your-council communityfoundationni.org/grants/coronavirus-community-fund/

