



Volunteering and COVID-19: Managing unsuitable applicants

1. BACKGROUND

The incredible response to supporting community and voluntary action has brought many new potential volunteers stepping up to offer their time and skills. We applaud their generosity and their willingness to help. Sadly, we also hear stories of some unsuitable individuals attempting to step into volunteer roles which it would be inappropriate for them to undertake.

Access to those who are vulnerable, to children or adults at risk, has always been an issue of which the third sector has been very much aware. Our safeguarding mechanisms regarding conventional risks are well honed. Despite the pressure we may feel to recruit rapidly right now, this is not the time to drop our guard. The required social isolation has severed supportive and protective links for many individuals and families who may now face additional risks.

Whilst the vast majority of our past, present and future volunteers are deployed with great care for the safety of all, the current circumstances may present opportunities for unsuitable applicants to slip through the net.

This guidance has been produced to help organisations manage unsuitable applicants during this time.

2. WHO IS AN 'UNSUITABLE' APPLICANT?

An individual's unsuitability for a role might depend on a number of factors, but could include the following information coming to light:

- Applicant is currently under police investigation
- Applicant is a registered sex offender
- Applicant has unspent convictions for theft or fraud
- Other relevant information is returned on an enhanced DBS certificate which indicates the applicant would be unsuitable for the role
- Applicant has been previously dismissed from a volunteering or employment role due to safeguarding incidents
- Other organisations have taken steps to share information to express concerns about the applicant's conduct in relation to people who may be vulnerable

3. RED FLAGS

In the absence of concrete information, organisations should also be alert to 'red flags' about a person's conduct which could indicate unsuitability for a volunteering role, either during the application process or when placed in a role. This could include:

- fails to follow direction and disregards requirements
- displays aggressive or inappropriate behaviour in person or online eg sexualized 'banter' discriminatory language, intimidating behaviour
- breaks code of conduct in dealing with people who are at risk,
- breaks or blurs the boundaries that they should implement between themselves and the individual receiving a service

4. MANAGING UNSUITABLE APPLICANTS

Any organisation that becomes aware of an unsuitable applicant should not proceed with the placement or, if they are already volunteering, tell them to cease and desist their volunteering activity immediately. This should also be provided to them in writing.

Any authorisation that recognises their status as a volunteer with the organisation should be cancelled. Their own copy (volunteer's ID card or permission letter) should be returned or destroyed. Any persons that they were known to (e.g. service users) in their role as a volunteer should be informed that they are no longer undertaking a role as part of your organisation, and if the individual should contact the service user, they should inform the organisation at once. Any such persistent action should be reported to the police.

If an individual is in regulated activity, at the point in time at which they are dismissed from undertaking a regulated activity role (or if they resign or remove themselves from a regulated activity role), they should be reported to the DBS (see link below). If it is believed that the worker or volunteer wishes to obtain a position that is regulated activity, even if they are not in such a role at present, they can still be reported to the DBS.

An individual's account on Volunteering Wales can be closed, if administrators are informed of the situation.

Any organisation is also strongly encouraged to discuss the situation with their County Voluntary Council, in case the volunteer is known to other organisations: [Third Sector Support Wales CVCs](#)

5. INFORMATION SHARING

In some cases, it may be necessary to share information beyond your organisation if you become aware of people who may pose a risk.

Organisations should be aware that GDPR is not a barrier to sharing information when it comes to safeguarding people who may be at risk.

Please read our guidance for more information, [Safeguarding and Data Protection](#).

Under Part 5 of the [Wales Safeguarding Procedures](#), all workers (including volunteers) who have a role in direct contact with or who are responsible for, a child or an adult at risk, should be reported to the Local Authority Designated Officer if they act inappropriately in their role.

Any worker or volunteer in regulated activity (requiring a barring list check by law) should also be reported to the Disclosure and Barring Service under the duty to refer which applies to any employer or voluntary organisation placing a person into regulated activity: [DBS Report those unfit for work with children or adults](#). The DBS can then consider barring them from regulated activity.

Protect is a whistle-blowing charity which can support anyone sharing information about wrong-doing in the charitable sector: [Protect advice](#).

The Charity Commission expects all registered charities, through their Board, to submit a serious incident report to the Commission in response to a safeguarding incident: [How to report a serious incident in your charity](#).

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