



Volunteer Handbook for Community Emergency Groups

Useful Contact Information

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PLEASE NOTE: Whilst the organisations of the LRF provided this volunteer handbook and the information contained within it, the community group creating the community emergency plan is responsible for ensuring that the contents of the emergency plans and risk assessment and any other related documents are up to date and accurate and that all relevant guidelines are followed.

Except for any legal responsibility that we cannot exclude in law, LRF organisations are not legally responsible for any losses that arise from this volunteer handbook and associated documents.

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Introduction

The County Durham and Darlington Local Resilience Forum (CDDLRF) would like to thank you and your community for being proactive and giving up some of your valuable time, to help you to become as resilient as possible to any future emergencies.

Who is this handbook for?

- Community emergency coordinators (lead role in community emergency planning groups).
- Community emergency volunteers (support roles for community emergency planning groups).
- Other community volunteers (anyone else who wants to help before, during or after an emergency).

1. Welcome to Community Resilience

We are delighted that you have chosen to volunteer as a community emergency volunteer. Volunteers are central to the work of the Local Resilience Forum (LRF), and we can't be effective without you. The work you will do, will complement the response provided by the emergency services during an emergency incident in your community.

This handbook supplements the Community Emergency Plan template and aims to give you some background to the LRF and what it does, a summary of the roles and responsibilities of volunteers and how we, as an LRF can support you. It is designed to be a basic guide to being a community emergency volunteer, whether that is as a community emergency coordinator involved in planning, or, if you are called upon in an emergency as a support volunteer, helping with response. The Risk Assessment, Community Emergency Plan and any additional documentation also complement this handbook and aim to support the Community Emergency Group in the event of an emergency.

If you are unsure about anything either during an emergency incident or in the planning phase, then please ask. We are here to help.

1.1 A little bit about us

CDDLRF supports local communities to prepare for, respond to, and recover from emergencies. Several agencies such as the emergency services, utility companies, the NHS, Durham County Council and Darlington Borough Council form the LRF.

The purpose of the LRF is to plan for and respond to, any incidents that would require a multi-agency response, from organisations like Fire and Rescue Service and Police or the council. LRF planning includes organising training and exercising for the agencies within the forum. We ensure agencies are prepared, within available resources, to respond effectively to emergencies which may have a significant impact on communities in County Durham and Darlington.

The Civil Contingencies Unit (CCU) is the emergency planning team for Durham County Council and Darlington Borough Council. They act as the main link between the two councils and are part of the LRF. They ensure that the councils fulfil their statutory duties to plan, prepare, respond and recover from emergencies. They also support communities who want to become more resilient, by providing advice and guidance on how to go about creating and using emergency plans.

1.2 What is an emergency?

The definition: An event or situation which threatens serious damage to human welfare in a place in the UK, the environment of a place in the UK, or war or terrorism which threatens serious damage to the security of the UK.

The definition of an emergency may be different to the community than it is to the emergency services.

An emergency to the community is anything that the community believes is impacting on, or could impact on residents' welfare and/or safety. The Community Emergency Group can activate their plan whenever they believe this is or could be happening (see the activation flow chart in the community emergency plan).

1.3 What is resilience?

A dictionary definition would say that resilience is the ability to withstand adversity and bounce back from difficult life events.

For your community, it means getting your group prepared so that you can anticipate, respond to and overcome emergencies, working alongside the emergency services. Communities which are organised, are better able to cope and recover from difficulties when they occur.

1.4 A little bit about you

You have chosen to be a community emergency volunteer because you care about your community, and you want to make a positive difference. There's no such thing as a typical volunteer because everyone is different. But all volunteers have one thing in common – you are vital to making your community resilient.

1.5 What can you expect from us?

We want to make sure that you are confident in your role and get the most out of it. Our commitment to you as a volunteer, is that we will:

- always treat you with respect, consideration and appreciation;
- ensure you understand your responsibilities and boundaries;
- give you information about training and support relevant to your role;
- maintain communication with your community group;
- offer your group fair, honest and timely feedback on your work as a community emergency group;
- update your group on how your work has made a difference, including helping you to update your community emergency plan and understand lessons learnt from emergencies and incidents.

1.6 Expectations of a community volunteer

As an LRF, we want to work with you and to support your community to become more resilient.

To ensure you get the most out of your role, please try to do the following:

- Provide as much notice as possible if you are unable to fulfil your volunteering commitment, or if you no longer wish to be involved as a resilient community volunteer, please contact the named emergency coordinator for your local area (details can be found in your community emergency plan).
- Always treat staff, emergency responders and fellow volunteers with respect, consideration, and appreciation.
- Act in a professional way whenever you are responding to an emergency situation.
- Work with the emergency services and your community emergency coordinator and listen to what they say and follow their instructions.
- Act in a way that doesn't discriminate against or exclude anyone.
- If you don't fully understand your role and responsibilities, please ask your community emergency coordinator for guidance.

2. Roles and responsibilities

2.1 Community Emergency Group

The Community Emergency Group is responsible for maintaining, reviewing, updating and activating the community emergency plan.

The Community Emergency Group is the local point of contact for members of the community regarding resilience issues.

2.2 Community Emergency Coordinator

The Community Emergency Coordinator is the lead person for the Community Emergency Group. The Coordinator acts as the link between the Community Emergency Group, the CCU and the emergency services and allocates tasks to other volunteers. They are also responsible for ensuring volunteers are paired up or “buddied” so that no one is working alone - see Appendix D on assessing risk for volunteers.

2.3 Civil Contingencies Unit (CCU)

There is always a member of the CCU available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. They are called the CCU Duty Officer and act as the on-call officer for Durham County Council and Darlington Borough Council for civil emergencies.

The Community Emergency Coordinator will activate the community emergency plan. This will be done in conjunction with the CCU Duty Officer, via email if possible.

The CCU also provides advice and can answer any queries relating to this plan during office hours via our email address.

2.4 Other responding agencies

Emergency services and other responding agencies are aware of this plan and should consult with the Community Emergency Coordinator when arriving at the scene of the incident.

3. Training and exercising

When you have completed your community emergency plan, we will plan a table-top exercise to test your plan to make sure it works for you as a community, and the emergency services. This can be done within the duration of your Community Emergency Group meeting.

You and your community may benefit from some training to help you in your role as a volunteer. We will signpost you to any training and resources that we believe may support you. The onus is on you and your community group to take part in any training you believe is relevant.

4. Your responsibility to others

Despite your best intentions as a community emergency volunteer, always bear in mind that in certain situations, you may not be the right person to help or provide advice to others. In some situations, the most responsible course of action may be to seek support from a trained professional, rather than trying to provide assistance yourself. As well as looking after yourself, do not put the safety and wellbeing of others at risk through your own actions.

5. Health and safety

It is important that you:

- carry out your duties without endangering either your own health and safety, or that of fellow volunteers, emergency services, other emergency responders and/or the public;
- comply with all relevant instructions and procedures relating to safety;
- inform your emergency coordinator (as named in your community emergency plan) of any personal health and safety requirements that you have.

It is not always easy to assess the level of risk you may face in advance of an emergency. During an incident, sudden changes to the weather, the time of the day, the behaviour of others, and other factors can potentially make certain tasks riskier. Continually assess the risk as you carry out your role. Remember to always consider the capabilities of volunteers when allocating tasks.

If you believe a task to be a too greater risk to undertake safely, consider if there is an alternative way of doing it. You might want to put something in place to reduce the risk, for example using certain equipment or asking for assistance from others.

If you are still concerned it is important that you DO NOT do the task. Instead, report back to the Community Emergency Coordinator with your concerns and await their instruction.

Remember that you are not part of the emergency services and you should not place yourself in danger in any way. Your safety is paramount at all times.

5.1 Working in pairs

Volunteers must, wherever possible, always work in pairs to:

- assess risk and decide actions together with your Community Emergency Coordinator and fellow volunteers;
- swap tasks;
- safeguard yourself and members of the community;
- remind fellow volunteers to utilise the training they have undertaken;
- alert your fellow volunteers to any possible danger.

Remember to listen and act on any concerns about danger and risk. Never go out of sight of other volunteers wherever possible and always speak to your Community Emergency Coordinator if you are concerned about any volunteer actions, decisions and wellbeing.

5.2 Safety equipment

Place a priority on your health and safety. As a community volunteer you should always wear a high visibility jacket or vest when outdoors, day or night.

Remember to always be visible to others and always use a torch when working in low light or dark conditions.

You may want to consider using other equipment such as gloves and boots. Always keep equipment clean and ready for use.

5.3 what3words

what3words is an extremely useful app for your mobile phone and a website. It divides the world into 3 metre square blocks and each block has been given a combination of 3 words. This is useful if you need to locate something or have someone locate you in an emergency. It is much easier to use than coordinates and the emergency services advise the public to use it.

A what3words address looks like this: ///straw.vine.blows

www.what3words.com

6. Will the community group be held liable?

The government introduced the Social Action, Responsibility and Heroism Act 2015 (SARAH) to give legal protection to people who intervene in an emergency or an incident. The Act aims to give reassurance to members of the public wishing to help in an emergency.

Sometimes volunteers may be concerned about being liable for any action they may take in an emergency. As a volunteer, as long as your actions are carried out safely and with the best of intention, then the SARAH Act is there to protect you.

By setting up an organised community emergency group, undertaking training and exercising, equipping volunteers, and supervising what they do, along with retaining public liability insurance, demonstrates due diligence has been embedded throughout your community planning.

Your group should retain public liability insurance to cover any negligence claims and you should have the relevant documents and processes in place to support your insurance cover.

6.1 Neighbourhood Watch Public Liability Insurance

Durham & Darlington Neighbourhood Watch (DDNW) has negotiated free insurance through their national body for groups carrying out community resilience and emergency activities. For more information on Neighbourhood Watch visit their website: (ourwatch.org.uk)

To be covered by the scheme, your group must:

- join Neighbourhood Watch;
- have a community emergency plan;
- complete a risk assessment;
- submit the plan and risk assessment to the CCU and DDNW.

7. Data Protection

Data protection is about protecting people's privacy and personal information. The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2018 was introduced to protect an individual's personal information from being used unlawfully or for purposes they have not agreed to. In your role as a volunteer, you may become aware of personal information, some of which could be sensitive, and you may be told that it is covered by the GDPR legislation.

If you are collecting information as part of your community group, make sure you have permission to do so from the person whose information you are collecting.

Your group should have a privacy notice, which explains what information you are collecting and what you will use it for. For guidance on how to do this, visit:

<https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/sme-web-hub/make-your-own-privacy-notice/>

We recommend that as many volunteers as possible undertake GDPR training. We can signpost you to a relevant training body to do this.

For more information on GDPR see <https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guide-to-data-protection/guide-to-the-general-data-protection-regulation-gdpr/>

7.1 Confidentiality and sensitivity

As a volunteer you are expected to respect the sensitivity and confidentiality of the information you may receive or what you may witness. All volunteers may become aware of confidential information about others. Volunteers should not disclose any information or use it for their own or another's benefit without the consent of the person concerned and unless there is a need to do so. It is important that all volunteers recognise and maintain confidentiality of all information whilst being a community emergency volunteer.

Any concerns about confidentiality should be raised with the Community Emergency Coordinator.

8. Safeguarding

Safeguarding means protecting people's health, wellbeing, and human rights, and preventing harm, abuse, and neglect.

Volunteers can raise any concerns whilst engaged in emergency response, by contacting the Community Emergency Coordinator.

The coordinator would then raise an alert, if appropriate, in the same way as any other statutory organisation.

In County Durham, concerns about children should be directed to:

Report a concern about a child - [Durham County Council](#)
and for adults: Social Care Direct - [Durham County Council](#)

In Darlington Borough concerns about a child or adult should be raised with: Darlington Safeguarding Partnership (darlington-safeguarding-partnership.co.uk)

Safeguarding is at the heart of helping people and it is strongly recommended that volunteers undertake essential training.

9. Equality Diversity and Inclusion

Equality means ensuring everyone has equal opportunities, regardless of their abilities, their background or their lifestyle. Diversity means appreciating the differences between people and treating people's values, beliefs, cultures and lifestyles with respect. Inclusion means creating an environment where everyone feels welcome and valued. It will help you to protect everyone in your community and we strongly recommend you undertake essential training.

10. Training needs

We will support your training and development as a community emergency volunteer. As a minimum we would recommend that you complete training in:

- First Aid
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
- Safeguarding
- General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)
- Personal Wellbeing as a Volunteer

Testing and exercising your community emergency plan will potentially highlight additional training needs, along with the lessons you learn from responding to a community emergency. We can signpost you to appropriate training resources and funding providers who may be able to help explore funding opportunities. For more information contact the LRF.

And finally...

Thank you for working with the LRF and for being prepared to help your community.
Thank you for giving up your time and for taking your role seriously. You are helping to make your community a safer and more resilient place.



