



Information for prospective members - 2019

Thank you for expressing an interest in Sussex Search & Rescue (SusSAR).

Applications for membership are welcomed without reservation, however it should be noted that unit membership is not automatic and is subject to an ability to fulfil certain criteria.

Please take the time to read this document extremely carefully, paying particular attention to the comments regarding commitment to the team, both in terms of attending training & callouts, but also, equally importantly, to fundraising.

This document forms the basis on which you may decide to proceed with applying to becoming a member of Sussex Search & Rescue.

Aims of this document

This document is intended to

- Help inform your decision of whether to proceed with the membership process.
- Ensure you do not have misunderstandings of the nature of Search & Rescue work and the unit's specific requirements of membership.
- Provide advice on the route to becoming a full member of Sussex Search & Rescue, and the level of commitment required.

Origins and evolution of the team



The unit was formed early in 2002 by a serving Sussex Police officer, in response to recommendations that came out of the Sarah Payne inquiry. As you may recall, Sarah Payne was the young girl who was kidnapped from near Littlehampton. From the inquiry that followed, the Police identified that they could not properly manage the sheer numbers of public who wanted to assist with the search for Sarah. One recommendation made was that a professional volunteer search unit was set up, in order to assist Sussex Police.

Since then the unit has evolved and grown year-on-year to become the primary volunteer resource used by Sussex Police in the search and rescue of vulnerable missing persons.

The unit is justifiably proud of its reputation and the quality of service we offer, and has become one of the most progressive volunteer lowland search and rescue units in the UK. SusSAR is a full member of the Lowland Search & Rescue (LR), which is

represented nationally on the UK SAR(United Kingdom Search & Rescue) operators group. As well as primarily developing a close working partnership with Sussex Police, the unit could also be called to assist the NHS, the Fire & Rescue service, HM Maritime Coastguard, the Environment Agency, and the Kent, Surrey and Sussex Air Ambulance. The unit can also be called to assist other volunteer search units within the UK, as and when required. In very rare circumstances there have also been requests to assist with searches overseas (please note however, we do not participate in disaster environments overseas, such as earthquakes and/or tsunamis).

People from many walks of life make up the unit: Outdoor enthusiasts, Outdoor Instructors, former Armed Services personnel, teachers, and many more with more office based careers. **Many prospective new members believe they need to be experienced in climbing, mountain leadership, survival etc, but this is most definitely not the case. As long as you have a genuine desire to help others, more often than not in the middle of a cold wet night; to receive no recognition and not be paid for it, then this is just as valuable an attribute in the kind of person who is a member of our unit.**

Why Join?

The unit exists purely on the goodwill of volunteers, and membership is particularly rewarding to those who feel they would like to give something back to their community. It is also an alternative outlet for outdoor skills, with many callouts involving advanced navigation, tracking and bike skills. As part of the probationary membership process, you will receive training in navigation, first aid and water safety. Following qualification as a search technician there are then further opportunities to progress within the team; we have a water rescue team and a bike team as well as more advanced roles in team leading, search managing and search planning.

What you need & selection of members

In addition to an excellent sense of humour:

Applicants must be at least 18 years of age to be involved in an operational search. There is no upper age limit – we merely ask that you are reasonably fit, and are confident in the outdoors. In regard to fitness, the LR national standard that members must comply with is being able to cover 5 miles in 2 hours. Applicants are not expected to have any experience or competence in rescue skills as a prerequisite. The unit offers a comprehensive programme of instruction and training in search techniques and methods.

You need to be a genuine team player with a good sense of collective responsibility, e.g. appreciating that as a unit member your personal behaviour outside of the team (*e.g. on the hill etc.*) can reflect back on the whole of the unit. When operational we work in the strictest confidence and with the greatest integrity. Frequently we will come under public scrutiny via the media.

You will need to be open minded and able to accept that the peculiar demands of search & rescue call for different systems to those you may be familiar with through either professional or personal experience. SusSAR adheres to all best practices where possible and practical.

Potential members who come to us from other emergency services can struggle immensely with the absence of clear cut black and white boundaries, and can find themselves with a professional conflict of interests. The modern world of 'Search and Rescue' both Professional and Voluntary, operates on the acceptance that "*there is no place for rigid dogma in rescue*" and that operations are carried out to principles and not systems.

Searching makes up the vast majority of what we do operationally. Mostly this will be for vulnerable missing persons in terrain that the emergency services lack the personnel to cover. When operational, SusSAR takes the task of search very seriously, with the expectation that members are thoroughly professional.

There is a common misconception that search & rescue work is both fast and exciting. This image is particularly portrayed through the media, television and films. The reality is that only the 'action shots' are shown, making for good stories and imagery. In reality a search can take many hours, but never the less it is extremely important.

There is no glamour in any form of search & rescue, and we would not wish to recruit anyone who wanted to join with this as their aim. The work is always sensitive and can also be traumatic on occasions.

The team does of course have many lighter moments, especially before and after a training session, and those with experience of other emergency services or of stressful situations will appreciate, as previously mentioned, the importance of a good sense of humour.

The most important thing to remember is that the Police have primacy over any search, and we are therefore working for, and answerable to them.

Personal time commitment

Training takes place in the evenings of the second and fourth Thursdays of every month, commencing at 19.30 and will usually be finished by 23.00 at the latest. Furthermore, we also try to hold at least two weekend training exercises during the year, and these will often involve the other emergency services.

The location of our training evenings will vary across both East & West Sussex, so it is important you have suitable transport.

Types of membership

The makeup of a search & rescue unit is both varied and complex. The most visible role is that of the active search member. We rely very heavily upon our members also contributing towards our fundraising and equipment maintenance. The quality of our service would be much impoverished without these valuable contributions.

Not everyone has a capacity or the desire to become a search technician. But this does not mean that they are unable to support the team. Should you be interested in helping with one of our support roles then we would very much like to hear from you.

Application Procedure

Having read these notes, if you are still interested in joining our unit and believe you are able to commit the necessary time, then your next step is to attend our next new member evening, where a presentation is given that outlines in more depth how the unit operates.

A question we are often asked is “How long does the probationary training period last, before I can become operational?” The answer to this question varies, depending upon the commitment shown by the new member in attending our training evenings (and also integration within the team through supporting fundraising events) but in reality this process can take up to 6 months. Unfortunately some people think this is an unreasonable amount of time to have to wait, however please remember we are all volunteers and everyone’s time is limited. You will be training for a professional role, ultimately working for the emergency services.

During your probationary membership with us, you will also be required to undergo a Sussex Police vetting process. For your re-assurance, it is very rare that someone is not able to join the unit as a result of their Police vetting check.

Equipment

Search & Rescue is unpaid (including fuel costs) and voluntary work. Unit members are expected to provide and correctly maintain the majority of their own personal equipment, at their own expense.

It is likely many potential members will already own the vast majority of equipment, e.g. rucksack or webbing, clothing suitable for outdoor walking, compass, torch etc. In addition, the unit will supply, free of charge, safety glasses, a ‘bump’ (baseball cap with hard shell) cap, unit polo shirt, hi-visibility jacket, Keela waterproof jacket, notepad etc.

A final note

Membership of SusSAR involves a significant commitment in terms of time, effort and money. Please consider carefully whether you can afford, in all senses, this commitment before proceeding.

Thank you.

Whilst every care has been taken in compiling this document, and the statements contained herein, it is not all encompassing. If you are unclear or uncertain of any aspect, please feel free to ask.