



VILLAGE AGENTS

Providing older people in Gloucestershire's rural communities with easier access to services and information

PROGRESS REPORT

QUARTER 4

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VILLAGE AGENTS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Section	Page
1.0 Village Agents an Overview	1
2.0 April to June 2007	3
3.0 A Diary of a Village Agent	6
4.0 Monitoring	8
5.0 Village Agents a Demographic Picture (June 2007)	11

Appendix 1

Village Agent Progress Reviews and Feedback

Appendix 2

Full Village Agent parishes and contact details

1.0 VILLAGE AGENTS – AN OVERVIEW

The Village Agent project is a pilot scheme funded by the Department for Work and Pensions (LinkAge Plus) until June 2008. The aim is to provide older people in Gloucestershire's rural communities with easier access to information and services

Who is involved?

Gloucestershire County Council in partnership with GRCC. We also have an wide range of other partnership organisations involved in training and support, including the Police and Fire Service, Affordable Warmth Partnership, Care and Repair/Anchor Staying Put, Age Concern, Gloucestershire Primary Care Trust, District and Borough Councils; Community and Adult Care Directorate; libraries; local churches; parish councils; The Pension Service and many more.

What it does

Village Agents will bridge the gap between the local community and those statutory and voluntary organisations able to offer help or support where required. Working in clusters of 3-5 rural communities Village Agents will act as a facilitator in the provision of high quality information, promote access to a wide range of services, carry out a series of practical checks and identify unmet need within their community. Through training and access to appropriate information resources, the Village Agents will develop their capacity to provide a service within their communities both in the short and longer-term.

Village Agents have been recruited locally, trained and supported to provide face to face information and support which enables individuals to make informed choices about their present and future needs. The service will be provided primarily to older people, but other disadvantaged and isolated people will also be able to receive Village Agent support.



In total, 30 Village Agents have been recruited in order to identify the impact their role can have both on individuals and on communities, and to test the hypothesis that rural communities prefer to access someone they know within their community for help and advice. Now CRB checked, they will be in a position to visit older people both in their own homes and by running regular surgeries in suitable locations, i.e. village halls, doctor's surgeries etc. Equipped with a laptop and

mobile phone, they will be able to access information and give immediate information to their client base. The project provides an essential local service to over 100 of the most rurally isolated parishes in Gloucestershire. Many of our partner organisations are unable to provide an outreach service on this scale and are already seeing the benefits of being involved in this project.

Cost per year/funding

The project has received funding from Linkage Plus (part of the Department for Work and Pensions) for just under £1,000,000 for the duration of the project until June 2008. This funding is split between the County Council as lead partner and GRCC as project deliverer. Project Managers have been recruited by both GRCC and County Council to work on specific elements of this countywide initiative.

2.0 APRIL TO JUNE 2007

Quarter 4 has been a busy period for Village Agents who are now fully settled in their roles, beginning in April with progress reviews and culminating in June with a nomination for a national customer service award!

- For the Cotswold and Stroud Village Agents April saw the beginning of their progress reviews which took the form of one to one meetings with the project manager at GRCC to discuss issues and concerns and the way forward. Experiences varied with each Agent approaching the role slightly differently but all gaining results and each citing a number of key achievements. Forest of Dean and Tewksbury Agents took part in the process throughout May.

Please see appendix 1 for issues arising and the main findings of the appraisal process

- Forest of Dean and Tewksbury Village Agents were occupied in April with finding local people to attend focus groups as their part of the evaluation process. The groups were well attended in the majority of areas with one group attracting 12 people.

This was the final stage of the first round of evaluating the project, findings are now being analysed by The Institute of Local Government Studies at Birmingham University and the results should be available shortly.

- During Quarter 4 monthly meetings continued with the Village Agents meeting at Community House with the other agents from their districts to discuss ideas and receive ongoing training. Trainers for April, May and June included:

Forest of Dean District Council
The Police Community Safety Team for each district
Cotswold District Council – Safer Cotswolds
Cotswold Volunteer Service
Forest Voluntary Action Forum



Trainers confirmed for the coming months include the Pensions Service, Citizen's Advice, the Alzheimer's Society and Street Wardens (FOD).

- Stroud Village Agents were involved in a meeting with David Drew MP and over lunch discussed various topics and informed him of their work within their communities.
- All 30 agents attended a training day at Highnam Community Hall at the beginning of May; these meetings have proved to be extremely successful with agents from the different districts able to swap experiences and ideas. The two speakers for this event were Simon Church who spoke about the national Warm and Well scheme and Maxine Allan from Gloucestershire County Council who spoke about the Adult Placement Scheme for the county. Both speakers were well received.

Other events that many Village Agents have attended throughout quarter 4 include:

- GRCC's Community Consultation Event
- GRCC's In Touch Bereavement Event Stroud
- Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue – Launch of the Community Safety Advocate, Nailsworth Stroud
- GRCC Board of Trustee's meeting
- Regional Citizen's Engagement Conference at Cheltenham Racecourse



Village Agents have been getting involved with all kinds of activities and finding new ways to engage with their communities, a few examples are shown below:

- North Cotswold Village Agents are currently involved in a pilot project bringing together local shops with community transport to enable older people to shop locally and have easier access to facilities near to where they live. As part of this Village Agents are helping to scope out potential routes with a view to incorporating doctors surgeries, local farmers markets, libraries and anywhere else that local people state they would like to access on a regular basis, this is designed to be very much a needs based service. The initial meeting took place in May at Moreton Area Centre with a follow up in June.

- **Extract taken from 'This week in Adult and Community Care'**

It's Library Club but not as we know it Libraries & Information have been frequently been contacted by Village Agents looking for information on the RNIB service and a lot of visits to visually impaired customers have come from this route. In January, Jenny Cunningham, Village Agent for Ampney Crucis and Siddington, came to Cirencester Library Club to get some information from one of our guest speakers. She thought the Library Club was an excellent way of getting people together and talked to me about bringing large groups into the library to join our existing club. There were unfortunately several barriers to this, no room in the club being one of them, along with no volunteers to transport the customers! Undeterred, Jenny and Service Development Librarian, Joanna Palmer, came up with a solution that at present seems to suit everyone. Jenny holds Library Clubs once a month in Ampney Crucis and Siddington Village halls, it's very much a social occasion, refreshments are provided, the members discuss the books they have read and have started to write reviews for the Book Choice magazine. As well as a start up book collection I provided Jenny with membership forms for each customer and a detailed form listing the type of books enjoyed. Before each club Jenny selects more books if necessary and checks to see if any reservations have arrived.



Joanna has visited each club to demonstrate the Daisy Player and enrolled customers to the RNIB service as a result. It's a simple way of reaching home-restricted borrowers who can get to their Village hall - Jenny has been able to arrange transport for that - but not the library. We are able to get more active borrowers and issues and the customers swap recommendations for books and enjoy the social context.

Customer Service Award

Village Agents have been nominated for an award, the National Customer Service Awards are an annual event and Village Agents have made the final three in the Customer Service Team of the Year category.

A presentation to the judging panel takes place in Berkshire on the 9th July with the winner announced at a glitzy ceremony in London in September.



During the last few weeks of June all Village Agents have been involved in the making of a DVD to show to the judges, this will also be used as a training and information DVD in the future.

3.0 DIARY OF A VILLAGE AGENT

Over the last few months, as I have made contacts and new friends in one of my villages, the name of a particular couple came up time and time again, as possibly being in need of the help of the Village Agent. They were obviously very well thought of in the community but it was considered that I wouldn't be able to make any inroads as the couple lived a life modelled on the Steiner philosophy which avoided the use of modern technology or such "luxuries" as central heating. The rumours were that Mr F had become a recluse and had some eccentric habits and had been seen walking the neighbourhood looking dishevelled and talking to himself.

All I could do was knock on the door (to no avail) and put my card through the letterbox. Some weeks later I had a call from Mrs F asking me to visit.

I was met by a gentle softly spoken women wrapped in numerous layers of warm clothing. The house was a solid old building and had been the family home for some 30 years. I was immediately hit by the smell of damp and the cold. It was cold in a way that you could sense the house had almost never felt warm, and Mrs F was chilled to the bone.

When I do an initial visit as a Village Agent, I try to ensure that I can spend as much time as possible with the client as I think that it is crucial to make contact, get to know each other, and for trust to begin to be built up. More often than not, the presenting problem is not the main concern of the client, and that will come out on subsequent visits.

For Mrs F it was the heating (or lack of it). She had been happy to live in this way up to the last few years but as is often the case, circumstances change and now she was feeling frail and desperate. The "eccentricity" of her husband was in fact schizophrenia, and the particular aspect of the disease which he suffered from meant that his personality had changed totally. From being a loving, caring and practical-minded husband (and a brilliant intellectual), he now spent most of his days sitting in a dark, silent room upstairs and only leaving to eat his food. He no longer seemed to know who she was, and more often than not, treated her with disdain. He had spent over 2 years in hospital after the first episode, where sadly one of their twin son's was also sectioned for a while. He received 6 weekly injections of medication from the district nurse who was one of the few people he had any contact with.

So where did I come in? First task was to arrange a home safety check (all the appliances were very old and there was no sign of smoke alarms). I asked Mrs F if she had any and she replied "there's one on top of this cupboard which someone gave me a few years ago, is that any good".

We contacted "Warm and well" and arranged for the application forms to be sent.

The following week I visited to help fill in the forms. These are very straightforward but because Mrs F is so distressed these days she is unable to think clearly and even a simple task is sometimes beyond her. This is where I feel we as Agents can do so much good; we have time to sit and do these things and it takes the pressure off people like the District Nurses who often step well beyond the boundaries of their role, to help their patients.

Adding to her distress was the fact that her drains had blocked and she was waiting for Dyno Rod to come out for the second time in 3 months. At over a £100 a time this was naturally worrying and it was an area of life that she'd never had to deal with prior to her husband's illness. Their home was on a cesspit and he had maintained the drains on a regular basis.

All in all, I have done the following for this client

Still waiting for action from Domestic & General who are to do the assessment re the Warm & Well referral. Have discovered today that the file has got lost, so have to be present with Mrs F when they call to do the assessment next week.

Checked with Stroud Council if the property was now on main drainage or if cesspit needed emptying (Mrs F has no idea).Followed up the drain problems with the company working for Dyno Rod and discovered that this problem will continue as it is due to tree roots and the collapse of the pipes. All the pipes can be replaced on the house insurance of Mr and Mrs F, but unfortunately Mr F does not believe the findings and refuses to allow a survey. He has agreed to consider it if the pipes block again in this year.

Obtained an electricity meter key to do reading for Mrs F who was very concerned at £600 bill this quarter. There is no television, computer etc. The washing machine is used once a week. After discussion with the Electricity supplier it appears the bill is genuine and possibly due to plug in heaters being left on all night by Mr F. This has increased the urgency to get the central heating installed and checks done re possible other savings.

Arranged delivery of an unwanted calor gas heater from neighbour, with contact details of gas supplier.

Contact number for cooker servicing company, as Mrs F's cooker does not appear to be efficient or safe.

As with many of my other clients, Mrs F could have found out these details herself if she was not feeling distressed. Mrs F is only 69 and is a very intelligent but not an especially practically minded lady. She has never had to deal with these aspects of running a home until recently and has no idea where to start. Additionally because she is suffering from stress, she has become very forgetful and has lost her confidence. She now knows she can ask me for help now but she is reluctant to call me as "there are people out there who really need my help"!

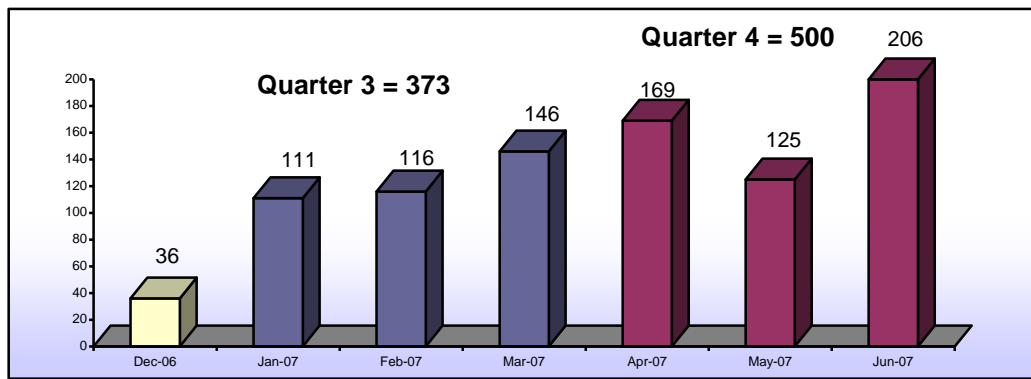
4.0 MONITORING

After each visit a Village Agent makes, they are required to fill in a referral, 'gateway' form. The form collects demographic data, the nature of the problem and other information relevant to any follow up visit. The gateway form is then emailed to the required agency by the Village Agent for the query to be addressed.

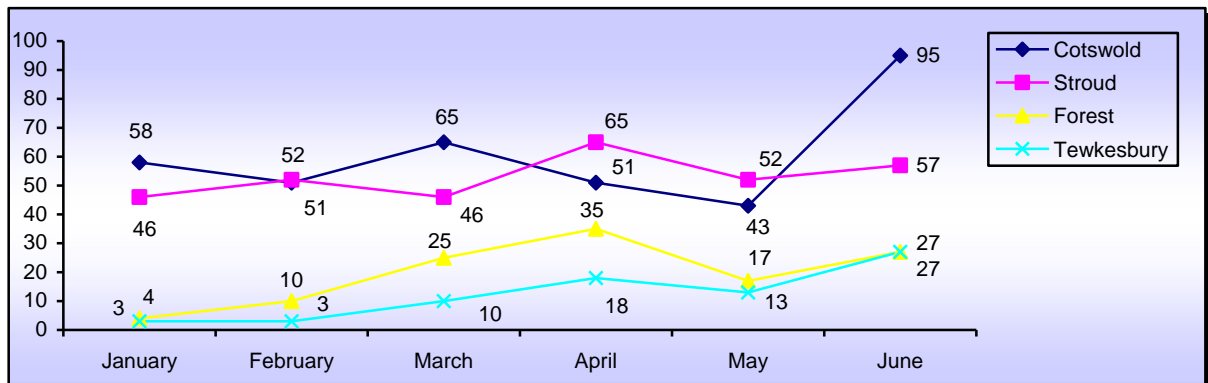
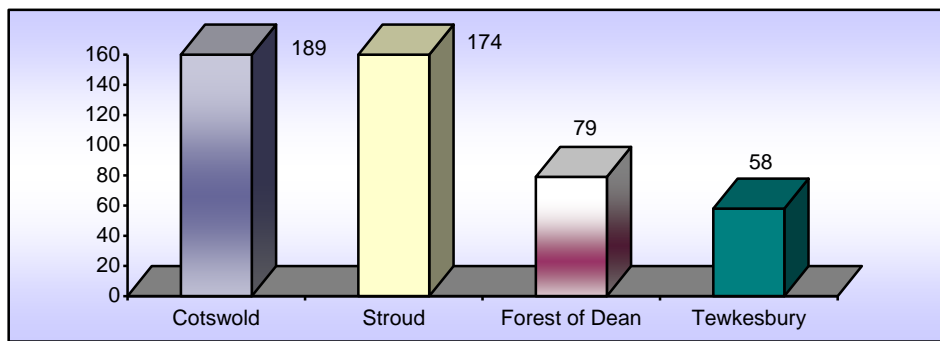
The chart below shows the number of referrals made to agencies in Gloucestershire.

- A total of 500 referrals were made by 30 Agents in quarter 4, an increase of 127 when compared with quarter 3.

Total number of referrals by month – June 2007



Number of referrals 01/04/07 – 30/06/07 by District



Please note that these figures are subject to change as referrals/gateways are sometimes submitted in retrospect

Between the period January to June the 30 Village Agents made contact with 7,784 people including members of the communities, service providers, existing groups (luncheon clubs, WI's, church groups, parish councils).

Village Agents have also dealt with a variety of issues as are shown in the chart below and overleaf. The most common issues are pensions and benefit advice, transport, fire and home safety, OT referrals and general support.

** Home improvement – gardening, home security, lifeline, minor adaptations, installation of grab rails*

Type of Contact	up to Dec	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	Total
Adult Placement scheme			1			1	2
Age Concern service			5	3	6		14
Bereavement					2		2
Blue Badge					2		2
British Legion			1	1	4	3	9
CAB - Financial	2			1	2		5
Carers	2		2	1	4	3	12
Community building			2	2	3	3	10
Community Warden			2		1		3
Council		5	3	10	3	1	22
Direct payments	1	1					2
Domestic Violence			1				1
Domestic help			1				1
DWP - Pensions/Pension credit	2	3	2	1	2	3	13
DWP - assessment	1	4	11	17	7	4	44
Employment				1		1	2
Energy - home heating/insulation		6	3	9	10	3	31
Energy - fuel bills	2	2	3		2	1	10
Financial	2	2	7	2	5	2	20
Fire and safety - smoke alarms	6	1	10	13	11	2	43
Funding/grants	4	1	1		2		8
GUiDE				1		1	2
GRCC - community Halls	1		1	7	3		12
GRCC - other				5			5
Health - general			2		3	2	7
Health - chiropody			1		1	1	3
Health - dentists		2					2
Health - falls	1		1				2
Health - medication		2	1	1	1		5
Health - appointments		3	3	3			9
Healthy lifestyle	1	2	3	15			21
Helpdesk - non referral support	1		5	6	2	3	17
Helpdesk - meals		1	1		1	1	4
Helpdesk - OT		4	11	17	7	4	43
Helpdesk - social care referral			7		1	1	9
HIA - gardening	1	7	5	3	1		17
HIA - home security	3	1	1				5
HIA - Lifeline	1						1
HIA - major work	2	1	1	3	1		8
HIA - minor work			7	7	7	3	24
HIA - minor adaptations	1	2					3

Home Safety Check	1		1		1	1	4
Housing - planning	1						1
Housing Association - support/repairs	1	1		3		1	6
Housing benefit			2	1	1	2	6
Housing - general support	1	5	4	2	2	2	16
Housing - private rented support		1	1				2
IT training/assistance					2		2
Libraries - clubs	1		1		2		4
Libraries - sight impaired help	2						2
Lifeline				5	4		9
Lifelong learning	1	2	1	1			5
Mental Health	1	1					2
Message in a bottle	1		2	1	3	5	12
Other	1		1		1		3
Police - cold callers	1						1
Police - Community policing		1	1				2
Police - domestic violence		1					1
Police - home security	3		1	1	2		7
Police - victim support		1					1
Sensory impairment	1	1	2	2	1	2	9
Social activities		1	3	7	10	3	24
Support - family/neighbour concerns		1	1		1		3
Support - general	5	26	22	24	29	15	121
Transport	9	17	7	6	12	3	54
Volunteering	2	1	1	6	5	1	16
Wills			1			1	2
	66	110	149	184	156	74	739

The Adult Help Desk

The Adult Help Desk based at Shire Hall has been used as a source of advice and referrals by the Village Agents in their first few months of employment and will continue to be a vital point of contact throughout the life of the scheme.

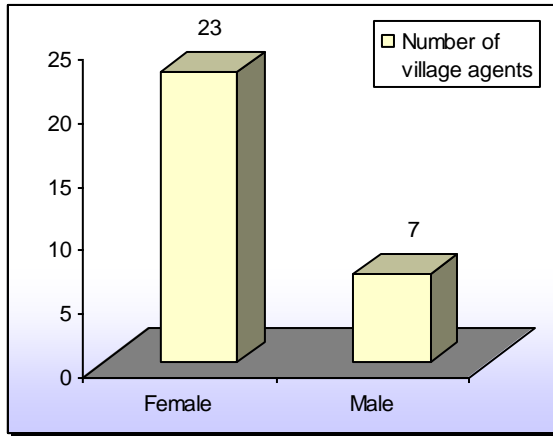
Calls made by village agents are logged and the nature of the enquiry noted. Village agents may ring the help desk in reference to a particular issue or simply for background information.

The Adult Help Desk number is printed on publicity materials distributed by Village Agents in the event that a member of the public cannot contact a Village Agent or they do not feel comfortable calling a mobile phone number. In this eventuality the Customer Service Officer will pass on the query to the relevant Village Agent in order that a home visit can be arranged.

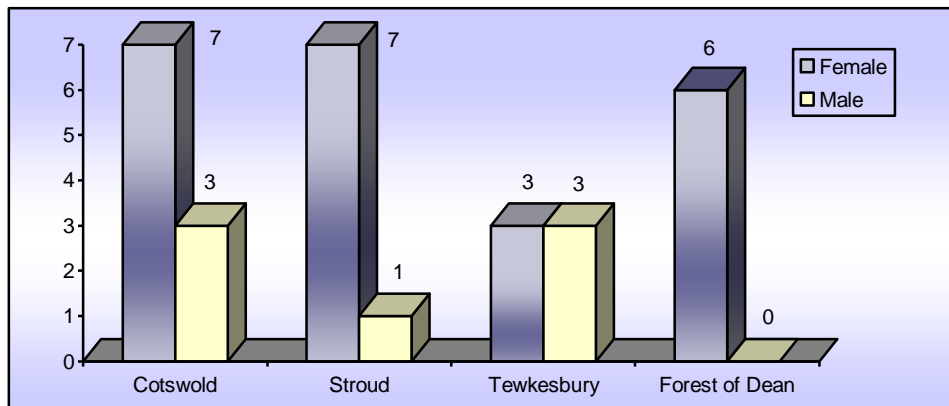
5.0 VILLAGE AGENTS – THE DEMOGRAPHIC PICTURE

Village agent profiles

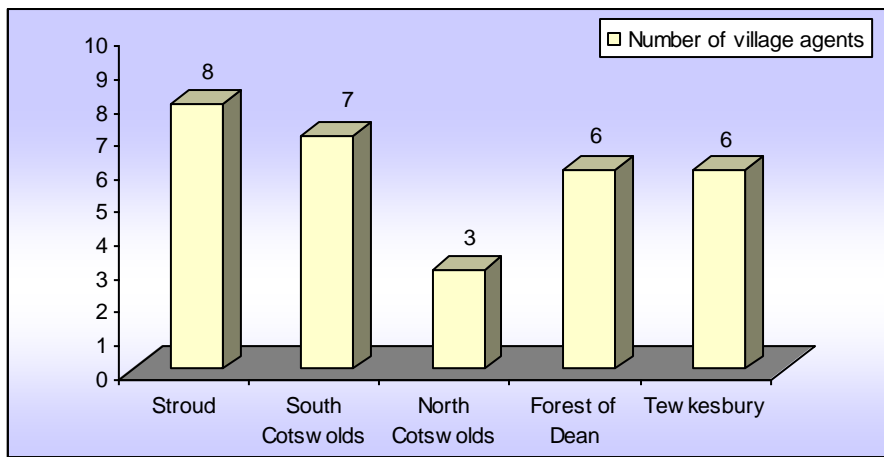
The village agents come from a variety of backgrounds and range in age from 40 to 70. Approximately three quarters are female and a quarter male.



As the charts show, 77% of the Village Agents across the county are female. In the Cotswolds and Stroud a large proportion are female whilst in Forest of Dean all clusters have female Village Agents. Tewkesbury Borough has an equal ratio male to female agents.

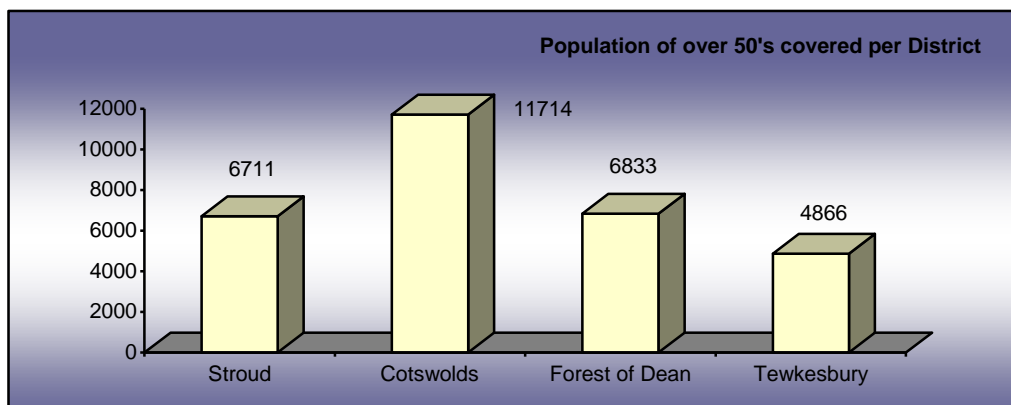
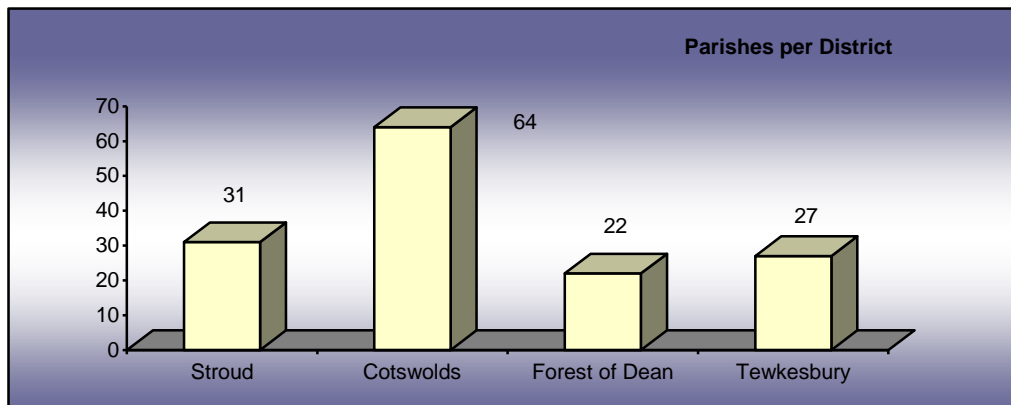


Spread of Village Agents by District



144 of Gloucestershire's 258 rural parishes are now covered by one of the thirty village agents (56%). These parishes contain a total of 30,124 people aged 50+ (source: Gloucestershire County Council mid-2005 estimates, published November 2006).

Coverage by Parish and Population



APPENDIX

1

APPENDIX 1

Village Agent progress reviews and feedback – March/May 2007

Below is a summary of the main issues raised by Village Agents as part of their 6 month progress reviews held in March & May 2007.

Please note that the list is not exhaustive but consists of the points raised most frequently.

What have you most enjoyed about being a Village Agent?

- Meeting the older people
- Meeting people that would not necessarily have met otherwise
- Attending groups and meeting individuals
- One to one contact
- Being out and about in the areas
- The Challenge
- Making new friends
- Helping people
- Linking in with organisations – setting up sustainable links
- Being creative
- Seeing results and hard work paying off
- Finishing the day with a real sense of achievement
- Supporting people through things that seem small but make all the difference

What have been your key achievements as a Village Agent?

- Making good solid contacts
- Building up the word of mouth network
- Being associated with the name Village Agent
- 'Infiltrating' the existing groups
- All gateways are an achievement
- Seeing the fruits of what a Village Agent can achieve
- Being accepted
- Creating a legacy that can be sustained
- Setting up T'ai Chi classes, now have an attendance of 20+ per session
- Being able to offer a service that people really need
- Breaking down barriers in the more 'hostile' parishes
- The Nature of the project is that you have small achievements all of the time

What have you least enjoyed about being a Village Agent?

- Lack of warmth from official circles within the parishes at the beginning
- Having to 'sell' the project
- Feeling lost at the beginning
- IT problems
- Evaluation
- Lack of understanding at how important targets were
- Skills not being utilised
- Form filling very time consuming
- The thought of having to resort to cold calling
- Insecurities about stepping on other agencies toes

What have you found most challenging about being a Village Agent?

- Accepting that it will take time/Allowing time to take its course
- Distinguishing how far to take something – advice : signposting
- Not getting too involved
- Having the confidence to make the correct referral
- Going from 0-60 extremely fast
- Getting positive feedback from contacts made
- Overcoming scepticism
- Antagonistic and territorial attitudes of people in some parishes
- Initial contact with groups/public speaking
- Getting to know about all of the different agencies that are out there
- Keeping to 10 hours a week
- Technology
- Getting the point across about the project
- Getting people to change their attitudes
- Fulfilling expectations
- Building trust and letting the parishes know that you are one of them
- Getting to know the differing parishes

What are the main difficulties/barriers that you have encountered?

- Negative attitudes of some parishes
- Existing/historical politics/issues in parishes
- Time restraints
- Time of year
- The name 'Village Agent' is sometimes a barrier
- Demographics in some areas – very affluent, AB's, second homes, commuters
- Lack of publicity in some areas
- Border issues between other counties

How have you overcome any difficulties that you may have had?

- Lateral thinking
- Looking for alternative avenues available
- Nipping problems in the bud/Facing them
- Treading carefully
- Perseverance
- Determination
- Accessing key people in the communities
- Ask for help/asking questions
- Tact
- Staying neutral
- Being proactive
- Enthusiasm and enhanced positive thinking
- Explaining and giving examples
- Putting in time and effort

Support and additional comments

- More publicity
- Events such as the Bereavement event are more useful than meeting with other agents
- More informal interaction with other Village Agents - networking
- Newsletter good idea
- Internet Forum
- Always someone who can help at GRCC
- Training given by presentation and straightforward information is helpful
- Refresher training from original trainers – bullet points
- More demonstrations such as T'ai Chi
- Sharing of best practice
- More interaction between GCC and GRCC and the health professionals to create a more joined up service
- More sessions at the Adult Help Desk
- Topical training – information on topics in the news – key facts
- Time spent with the actual agencies would be useful

APPENDIX

2

APPENDIX 2: Parishes included in the Village Agent Scheme to date June 2007

COTSWOLD VILLAGE AGENTS

COBERLEY, COWLEY, BRIMPSFIELD, ELKSTONE,
COLESBOURNE, SYDE

Mike Bone

Email: Michael@villageagent.grcc.org.uk

Telephone: 07810630122

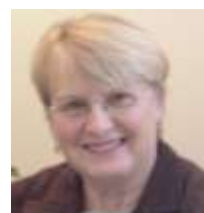


DAGLINGWORTH, BAUNTON, BAGENDON, DUNTISBOURNE
ABBOTS, DUNTISBOURNE ROUSE, EDGEWORTH,
SAPPERTON

Pauline Thompson

Email: Pauline@villageagent.grcc.org.uk

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CHEDWORTH, YANWORTH, COLN ST DENNIS, HAMPNETT,
NORTH CERNEY, RENCOMB, WINSON

Cynthia Laird

Email: Cynthia@villageagent.grcc.org.uk

Telephone: 07776245780



QUENINGTON, HATHEROP, ALDSWORTH, WINDRUSH,
MESEYHAMPTON

Sue Black

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PRESTON, AMPNEY CRUCIS, AMPNEY ST MARY, AMPNEY
ST PETER, SIDDINGTON, POULTON

Jenny Cunningham

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Telephone: 07785763339



DIDMARTON, WESTONBIRT WITH LASBOROUGH, BOXWELL WITH LEIGHTERTON,
KINGSCOTE & OZLEWORTH

Sandra Childress

Email: Sandra@villageagent.grcc.org.uk

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DOWDESWELL, WITHINGTON, COMPTON ABDALE, SHIPTON
OLLIFFE, SEVENHAMPTON, WHITTINGTON, ANDOVERSFORD

Nick Bailey

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Telephone: 07776245740



TEMPLE GUITING, GUITING POWER, CUTSDEAN,
CONDICOTE, SWELL, NAUNTON, NOTGROVE, COLD ASTON
ADLESTROP, EVENLODE, ODDINGTON, MAUGERSBURY

George Hill

Email: george@villageagent.grcc.org.uk

Telephone: 07798827678 or 07795286486



WILLERSLEY, SAINTBURY, WESTON SUBEDGE, ASTON
SUBEDGE, MICKLETON

Ann Cox

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STROUD VILLAGE AGENTS

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HORSLEY, ULEY

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VALENCE & FRETHERNE, FRAMPTON,
HARDWICKE

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HAMFALLOW & SLIMBRIDGE, HINTON

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NORTH NIBLEY & STINCHCOMBE

Richard Belliss

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BROCKTHORPE & WHADDON,
HARESFIELD, HARESCOMBE &
PITCHCOMBE, CRANHAM

Lou Kemp

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WHITESHILL & RUSCOMBE &
RANDWICK

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KINGSWOOD, ALDERLEY &
HILLERSLEY & TRESHAM

Marion Brown

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Tewksbury Village Agents

MAISEMORE, HASFIELD, TIRLEY &
CHACELEY, ASHLEWORTH,
SANDHURST

Jane Griffiths

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Telephone: 07810630244



DOWN HATHERLEY, STAVERTON &
BODDINGTON, LONGFORD

Pat Eady

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Telephone: 07810630064



LEIGH, ELMSTONE HARDWICKE,
UCKINGTON & STOKE ORCHARD,
NORTON, DEERHURST

Richard Lee

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