
Village Agents

Quarter 3 Year 4

January to March 2010

Providing older
people with easier
access to services
and information

Report produced by
Gloucestershire Rural
Community Council

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1.0 GLOUCESTERSHIRE VILLAGE AGENTS - BACKGROUND

The Village Agents Project began as a pilot scheme funded by the Department of Work and Pensions (LinkAge Plus) in 2006 with the aim of providing older people in Gloucestershire's rural communities with easier access to information and services. In June 2008 Gloucestershire Village Agents were mainstreamed as a service, with funding jointly provided by NHS Gloucestershire and Gloucestershire County Council.

The successful partnership between Gloucestershire County Council and Gloucestershire Rural Community Council (GRCC) continues with the Village Agents being employed and managed by GRCC.

A steering group made up of key stakeholders has been put in place and the scheme managers will report directly on a quarterly basis to the group. Processes that were used to report to the Department for Work and Pensions continue, collating demographic and numerical data using the existing gateway forms, with case studies and diaries providing anecdotal evidence.

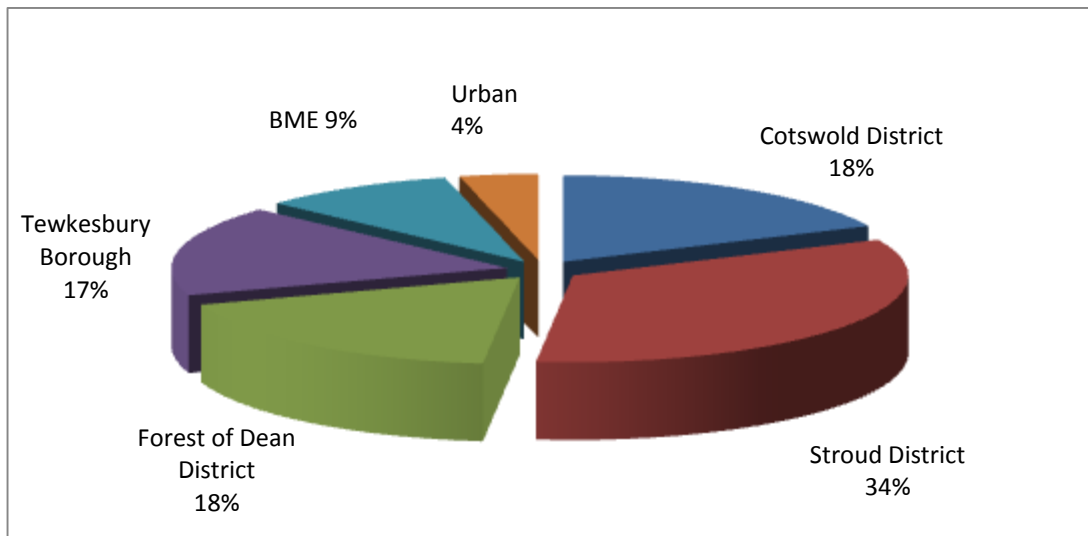
The success of the Village Agents project in Gloucestershire has gained a great deal of interest nationally, and other areas across the country are now running their own projects. Essex and Cumbria both launched their pilot projects in 2009, while Warwickshire and Bedfordshire launched pilot projects early in 2010. Wiltshire is currently finalising proposals for its own project, while interest has been expressed by Derbyshire, Cornwall, the Scottish Highlands, Carmarthenshire, and many other places around the United Kingdom.

This report focuses on quarter three of year four, January to March 2010. Earlier reports, including the report on the two year pilot project, are available on www.villageagents.org.uk.

2.0 REFERRALS – JANUARY TO MARCH 2010

After each visit a Village Agent makes, they are required to fill in an online referral, or '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 submitted to the required agency by the Village Agent for the query to be addressed.

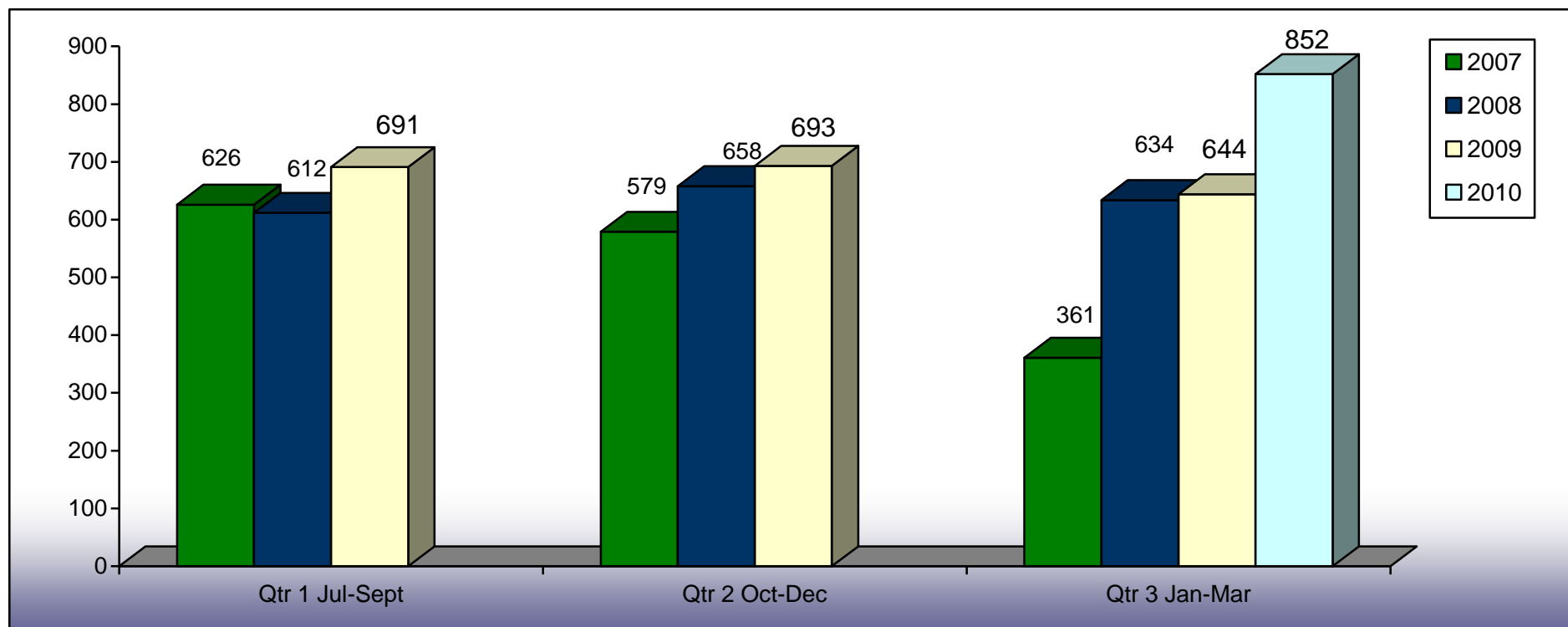
During quarter three of year four, (January to March 2010) a total of 982 gateway forms were submitted by Village and Community Agents. A percentage breakdown by district is shown below.



The district breakdown can vary by month and by quarter; during quarter 3 of year 4 Stroud District accounted for 34% of referrals – Cotswold, Forest and Tewkesbury Village Agents submitted almost a fifth of referrals each (18% and 19% respectively), while Community Agents dealing with the Black and Minority Ethnic communities submitted 9% of referrals.

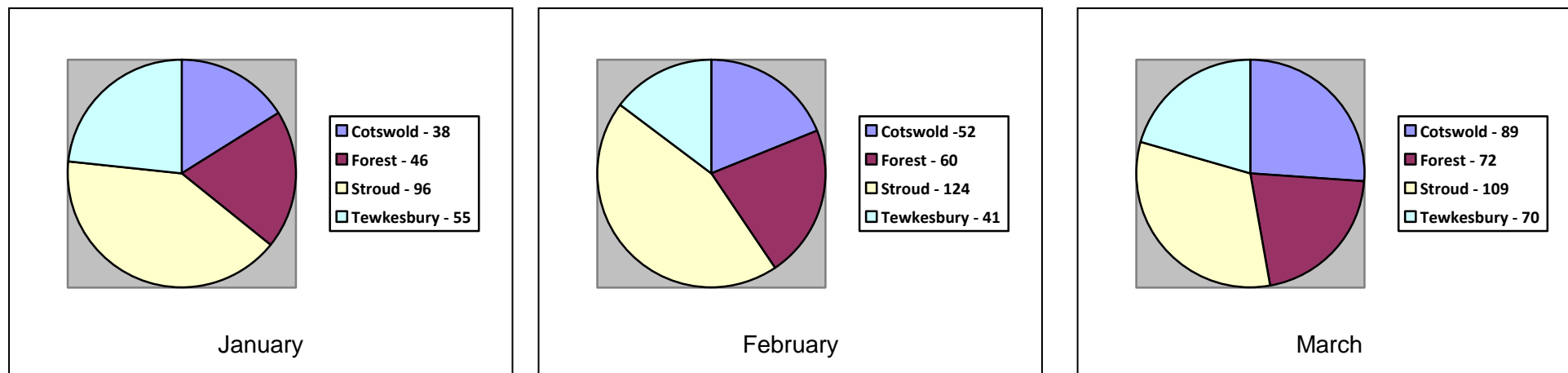
The Putting People First-funded Community Agents for six more urban areas around the county received training in February and have effectively been working in their communities since the beginning of March. In that one month they submitted 4% of the referrals for the quarter.

Year on year, with the exception of the first quarter of 2008, there has been an increase in the number of referrals made by the Village Agents. Even excluding the referrals made by the BME and Urban Community Agents as in the chart below, however, January to March 2010 has seen a dramatic increase in referrals on previous years and quarters.



While increased referrals are to be expected now that the service is well established, the rise of 208 referrals comparing January to March 2010 with January to March 2009, and even by 159 on the quarter October to December 2009 is noteworthy. Contributing factors could be related to the problems caused by the snow in January and February, increased publicity from the inclusion of the Village Agents' project in *Countryfile* on 31st January, and also issues relating to the Digital Switchover which occurred in large parts of the county in March and early April.

District referrals breakdown by month:



Stroud District was, along with Cotswold, the first area in the county to launch the Village Agents project. The six Agents are now well established and make consistently high numbers of referrals, although the impending Digital Switchover affects the Stroud and Forest of Dean Districts more than the others and Agents have been dealing with a lot of queries from clients related to the Switchover. Parts of Cotswold and Tewkesbury are also affected by the Switchover, and the increased numbers of referrals overall for March may well be a reflection of anxiety related to the change.

January, and the large amounts of snow, caused a problem for several Agents who were themselves unable to leave their villages. This may be reflected in the lower number of referrals made in that month, but it is also notable that the rural communities made greater efforts themselves to ensure their elderly neighbours had the help and support they needed in the bad weather.

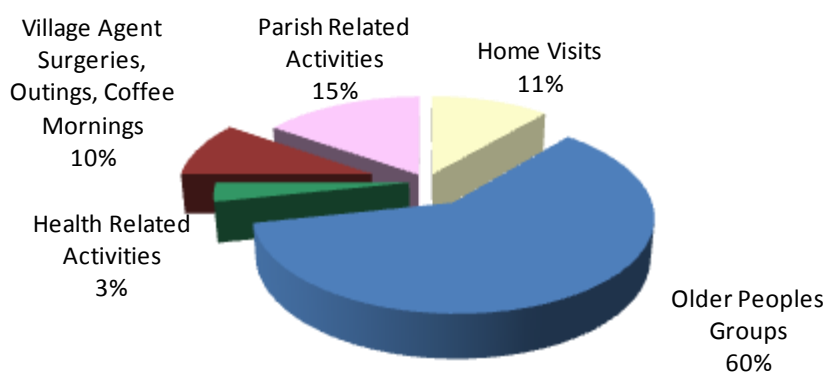
3.0 VILLAGE AGENT CONTACTS

Village Agents record the number of contacts that they have made during a particular month as part of their timesheet and monitoring process. During quarter three of year four Village Agents were in contact with over 8,500 people as part of their work.

Please note that these contacts include older peoples groups that Village Agents attend regularly, and also some repeat home visits. This will mean that there is an element of double counting; however it is important to record all contacts, repeat or otherwise as messages and issues raised can be different on each visit.

Contact definitions:

- Home visits – includes the client and anyone else present at that visit, family member, friend, neighbour etc
- Older Peoples Group – Group organised by the community for older people
- Parish Related Activity – Meetings with parish councils, WI's, parishioners met whilst putting up posters, leaflet drops, time liaising with parish magazines editors, etc
- Health related activity – Contacts made with doctors, community nurses, virtual teams, etc
- Village Agent Surgeries, Coffee Morning and Outings – people attending such events



During quarter 3, 60% of the contacts made with older people were made through older peoples clubs that take place around the county.

The table below shows the breakdown of contacts made with each group of people each month.

	January	February	March
Home Visits	289	305	364
Older Peoples Groups	794	1692	2672
Health Related Activities	15	155	118
Surgery, Coffee Morning, Outings	178	219	430
Parish Related Activity	86	565	651
Total	1362	2936	4235

4.0 VILLAGE AGENT ACTIVITY QUARTER 3 YEAR 4

4.1 SNOW IN GLOUCESTERSHIRE, JANUARY 2010

The new year brought heavy snowfall to Gloucestershire, cutting off many of the villages in more isolated areas of the county and causing disruption to food supplies to supermarkets. Combined with panic buying, this made it difficult for many elderly residents to keep well supplied. Cars were abandoned in the harsh driving conditions, schools were closed across the county, and many businesses were affected as the treacherous roads made it difficult for staff to get to work.



There was a knock on effect on the Village Agents too, many of whom live in the isolated villages that they represent. Several were unable to leave their villages for days, but they kept in contact with their most vulnerable clients by telephone and visited those that they could. What was admirable was the way in which the communities instantly rallied round, making sure that their vulnerable residents were looked after, salting roads in the villages where salt bins were available, and generally getting on with the task of waiting out the snow.

More concerning was the lack of support from neighbours available to elderly residents in more urban areas. Age Concern, Social Services and other bodies made requests for the assistance of Village Agents in the larger towns, such as Stow on the Wold and Dursley, but also in the Quedgeley area of Gloucester where an elderly lady who walks with two sticks was unable to leave her home to buy food due to the path being sheet ice – none of her neighbours had been round to see if she was alright or needed anything.

Below are a few examples of how the Village Agents were able to help their communities:

- Making telephone contact with vulnerable clients to check on their general wellbeing and food situation.
- Making and delivering soup for elderly residents where the Agent was unable to get out of her own village.
- Collecting prescriptions from doctors and chemists and delivering them to clients.
- Shopping trips into Gloucester for supplies of bread and milk when a local supermarket had run out.
- Buying groceries on behalf of clients who were unable to leave their own homes.

- Checking up on an elderly Alzheimer's patient living alone, following a call to Age Concern from the lady's daughter after it became clear carers had been unable to reach her for several days.

There was also a lot of positive coverage of the Village Agents in the local media:

- Lou Kemp was filmed for ITV West visiting clients in Cranham;
- Lorraine Demir and Sallyanne Batchelor were interviewed for Radio Gloucestershire, with Lorraine being shadowed by the reporter around Winchcombe;
- Articles about the project appeared on the BBC Gloucestershire website;
- Daily rolling coverage on the thisisgloucestershire website made several references to the activities of Village Agents;

Mark Harper, MP for the Forest of Dean, also praised the work of Village and Community Agents during the snow in his weekly column in The Forester.

4.2 VILLAGE AGENT HELPS WAR HERO GET MEDALS 65 YEARS ON

Lorraine Demir, one of the Agents in Tewkesbury district, made front page news in the Gloucestershire Echo after she helped 92-year-old Seymour Wilcox finally claim the four medals he was awarded for his actions in the Second World War. Mr Wilcox served in the 6th Airborne Division and was dropped behind enemy lines on D-Day but was shot in the face while crossing a river during the operation and was later discharged from the army. It was only after his retirement many years later that he decided to apply for his medals, only to be told he had left it too late.

Half of the Echo's editorial column on 5th February 2010 was dedicated to the story as well, and included these words:

It's clearly filled Seymour with pride – and how appropriate it is that he should make a special point of praising Lorraine.

This hero of the 1940s finally has the credit he deserves thanks to a heroine of the 21st century.

Mr Wilcox was awarded the 1939-45 Star, France and Germany Star, Defence Medal, and War Medal 1939-45.



4.3 COUNTRYFILE

The edition of *Countryfile* broadcast on 31st January 2010 carried a feature on the issue of the increasing age of the rural population. As part of this, John Craven visited Gloucestershire where he accompanied Jane Griffiths and a group of clients on a minibus trip to the Over Farm Market. Jane was also interviewed about the Village

Agents project, and while the interview did not feature in the final broadcast it was carried in the BBC national news on the same day.

Following the broadcast, enquiries about the Village Agents project were received from the Scottish Highlands, Cornwall, Norfolk, Durham and Northumberland, both from individuals and from organisations interested in the possibility of such a scheme being set up in their areas. New clients also made contact with Village Agents in Gloucestershire as a result of the national publicity.

4.4 DIGITAL SWITCHOVER

Village Agents have been assisting clients receiving their television signals from the Mendip transmitter with the Digital Switchover, the first stage of which was on 24th March and which was completed on 7th April.

While many residents have managed to sort out the switchover themselves or with the assistance of their families, some interesting problems have been thrown up. One elderly gentleman was concerned that he might have to change his television and was reassured to find he did not have to get a new set, because his cat likes sleeping on the current one. Several members of a lunch club in the Forest of Dean receive both central and south west programming on their televisions and were therefore unsure whether they needed to do anything with regards to the switchover.

Agents have assisted people in accessing the Help Scheme, which has worked very well for most clients who have used it. At the time of writing the switchover seems to have progressed smoothly, although there are isolated reports of areas which do not seem able to receive the digital transmission through set top boxes and may instead require satellite to receive broadcasts.

4.5 COMMUNITY AGENTS FOR URBAN AREAS

The six month trial of the Village Agents principle in more urban areas of the county began with the recruitment and training of six Community Agents at the end of January and into February. By the beginning of March, all six were active in their areas, making useful contacts and picking up clients.

This pilot project will run until August 2010 and covers:

- St Marks, St Peters, Springbank, Hesters Way and Benhall and The Reddings wards of Cheltenham;
- Quedgeley Fieldcourt, Quedgeley Severn Vale, Tuffley and Grange wards of Gloucester;
- Tewkesbury, Ashchurch and Walton Cardiff;
- Rurardean, Drybrook, Cinderford and Ruspidge;
- Cam and Dursley;
- Stroud with Rodborough and Thrupp.