
Village & Community Agents

Quarter 2 Year 5

October to December 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 & COMMUNITY 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.

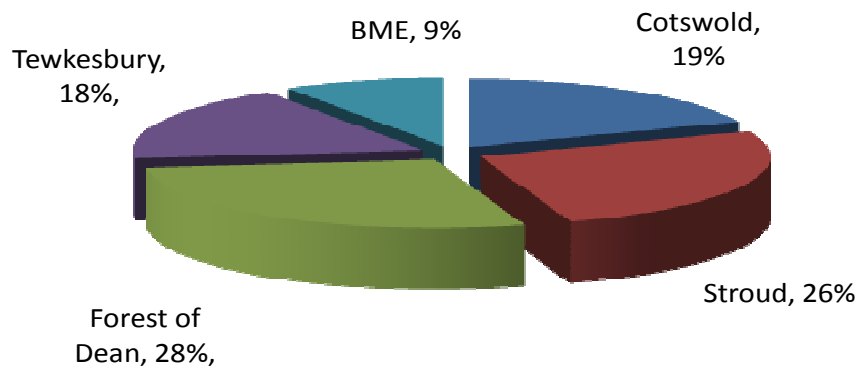
The success of the Village Agents project in Gloucestershire has gained a great deal of interest nationally, and other areas across the country are now running their own projects. Essex and Cumbria both launched their pilot projects in 2009, while Warwickshire and Bedfordshire launched pilot projects 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 one of year five, June to September 2010. Earlier reports, including the report on the initial two year pilot project, are available on www.villageagents.org.uk.

2.0 VILLAGE & COMMUNITY AGENT REFERRALS OCTOBER TO DECEMBER 2010

After each visit a Village or Community 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 or Community Agent for the query to be addressed.

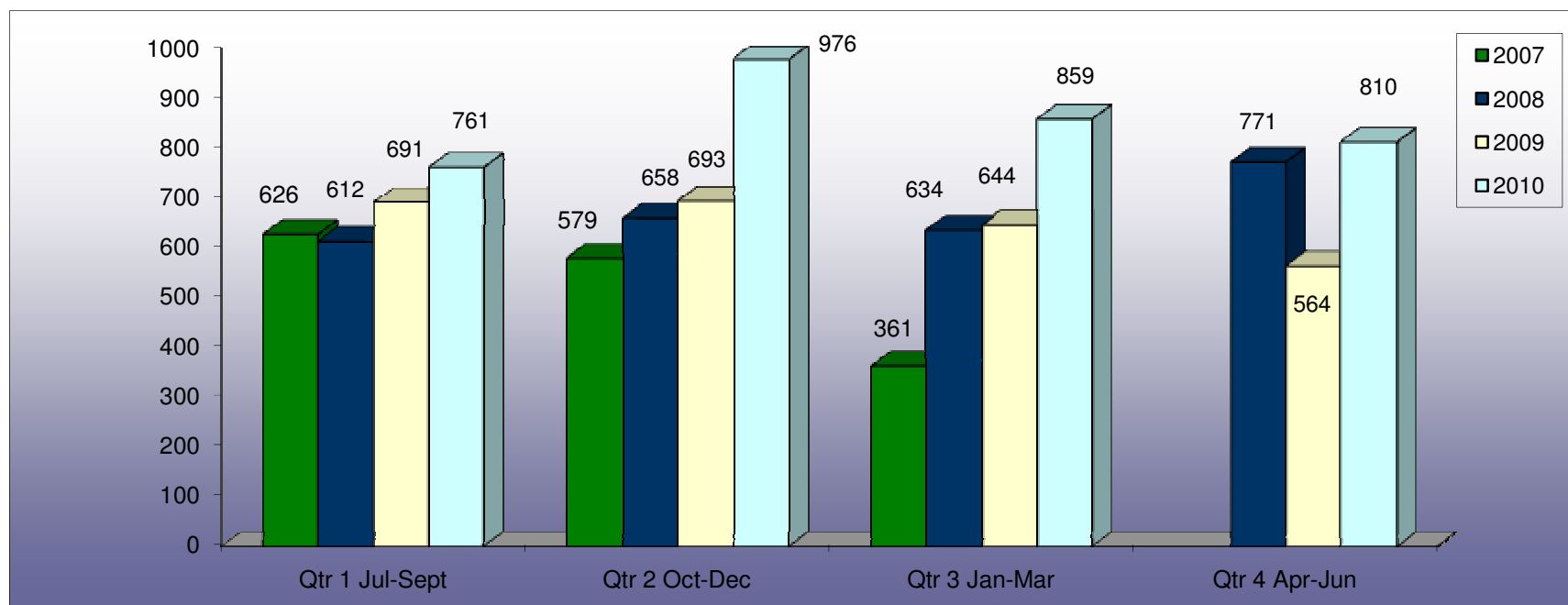
During quarter two of year five, (October to December 2010) a total of 976 gateway forms were submitted by Village and Community Agents. A percentage breakdown by district is shown below.



The district breakdown can vary by month and by quarter; during quarter 2 of year 5 the Forest of Dean District village agents made 26% of the referrals for the quarter and Stroud District accounted for over a quarter (26%) of all referrals, followed by the Cotswold and Tewkesbury Village Agents who submitted just over a third of referrals (19% and 18% respectively), while Community Agents dealing with the Black and Minority Ethnic communities submitted 9% of referrals.

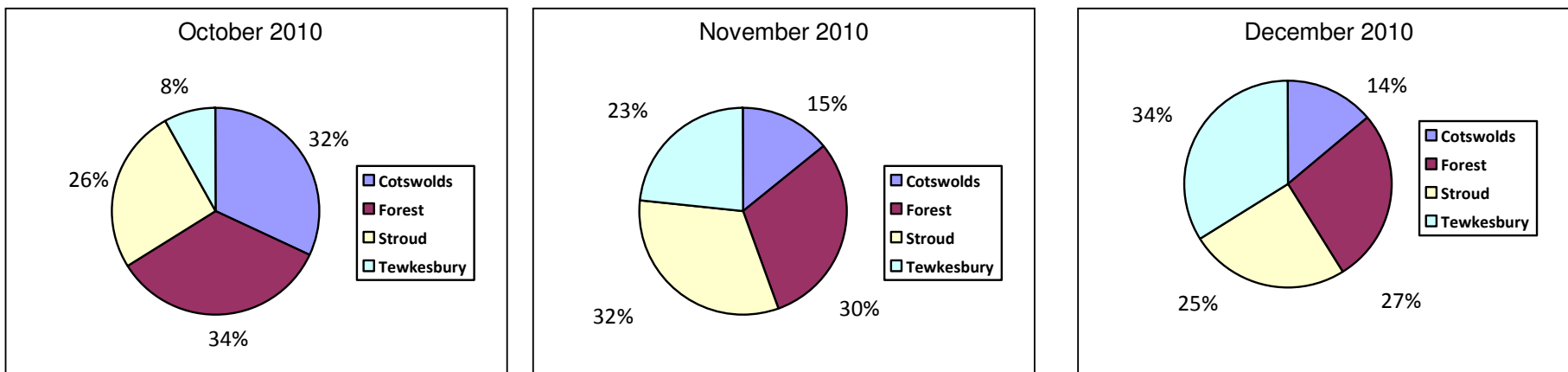
2.1 Village Agent Referrals

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, July to September 2010 has continued this trend.



While increased referrals are to be expected now that the service is well established, the rise of 283 referrals comparing October to December 2010 with October to December 2009 is still impressive. The profile of the service is kept extremely high within the parishes and districts as a whole. The work that was done around the Digital Switchover during April and May 2010 created new impetus for a number of Village Agents within their areas and contributed to the upsurge in referrals. This is now being built on with more of the county switching to digital in April 2011.

2.1.1 Village Agent District referrals breakdown by month:



Village Agents in the Forest of Dean District accounted for just over a third of referrals in October (34%, 126 referrals). In November this fell to just under a third (30%, 92 referrals) and December just over a quarter (27%, 59 referrals).

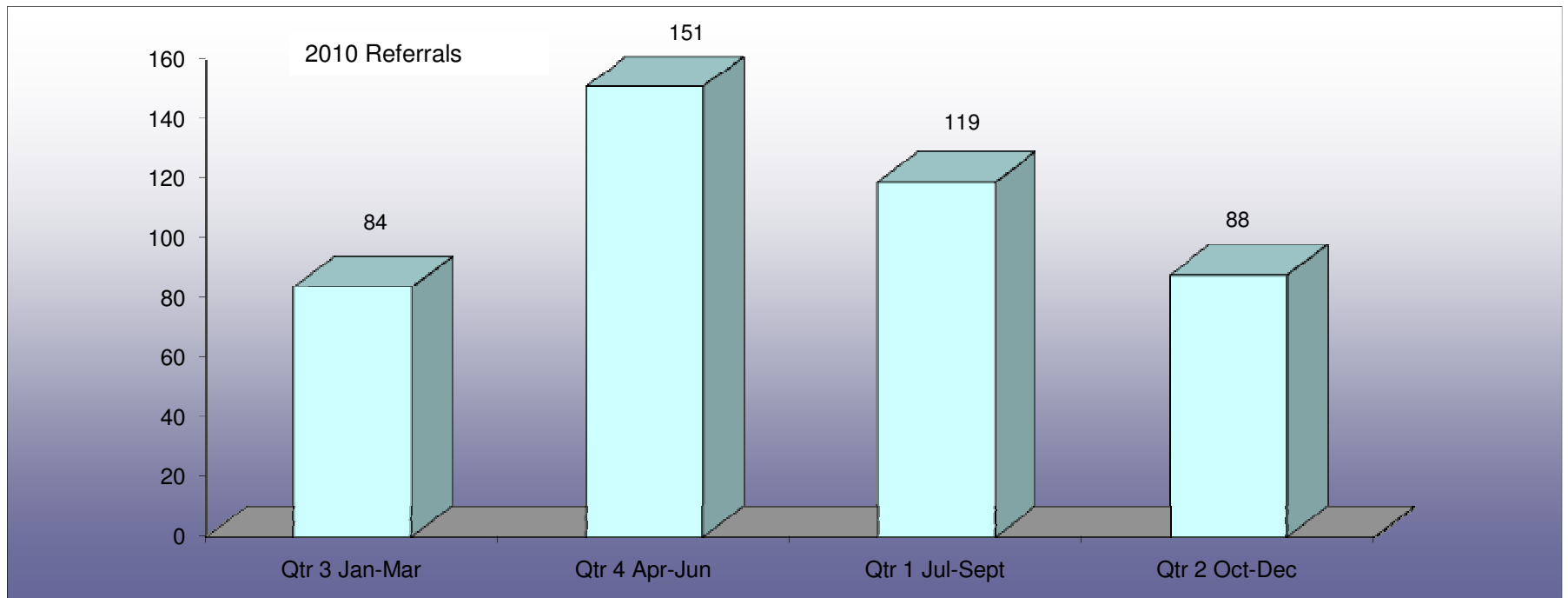
Referrals from the Stroud District peaked for the quarter in November (98 referrals) accounting for 32% of referrals countywide.

Tewkesbury Village Agents also saw a rise in referrals during the period October to December, peaking in December with 75 referrals.

Referrals from Village Agents in the Forest of Dean District fell slightly during each month of the quarter, accounting for 34% of referrals countywide in October, to 27% in December.

2.2 Community Agent Referrals

Community Agent referrals have varied quarter by quarter throughout 2010, peaking during quarter 4 of year 4 with 151 referrals. Quarter 1, year 5 has seen a slight decline in the number of referrals made (by 31) but up on the months January to March 2010.



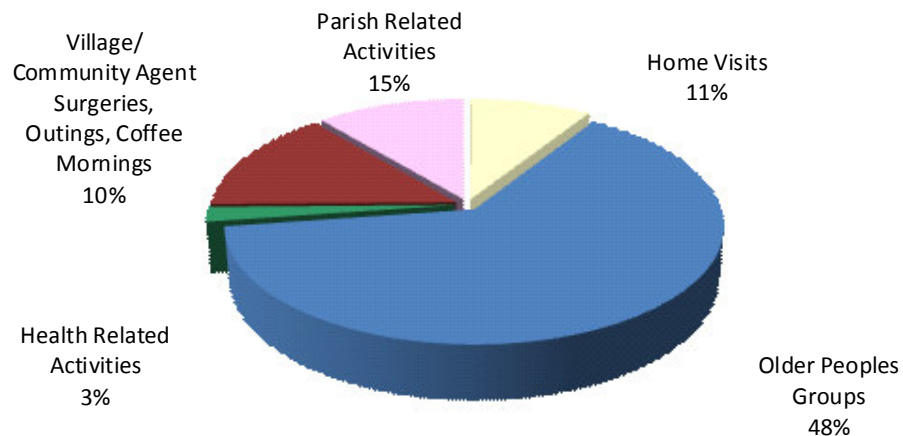
3.0 VILLAGE & COMMUNITY AGENT CONTACTS

Village and Community Agents record the number of contacts that they have made during a particular month as part of their timesheet and monitoring process. During quarter one of year five Village and Community Agents were in contact with over 10,547 people as part of their work.

Please note that these contacts include older peoples groups that Village and Community 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 magazine editors, etc
- Health related activity – Contacts made with doctors, community nurses, virtual teams, etc
- Village & Community Agent Surgeries, Coffee Morning and Outings – people attending such events



During quarter 1, just under half (48%) of the contacts made with older people were made through older peoples clubs that take place around the county.

The table below shows the increase in the numbers of contacts made by Village and Community Agents year on year.

Quarter	Number of Contacts
July to September 2009	6,076
July to September 2010	10,547

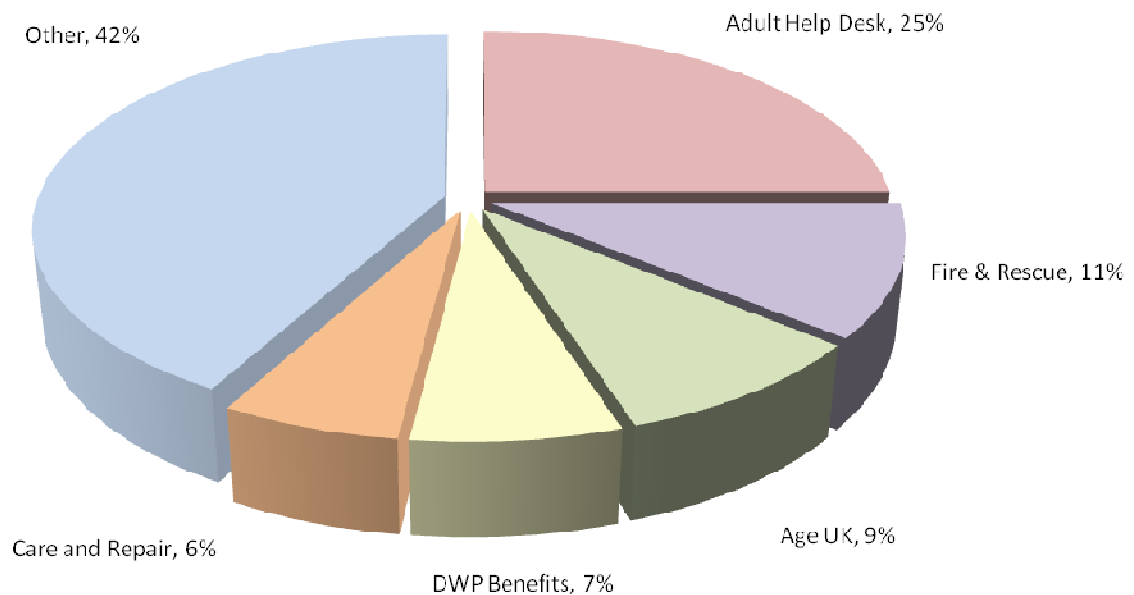
4.0 ISSUES ARISING

During the months of October to December 2010 a fifth (20%) of Village and Community Agent referrals to agencies or organisations were made to the Department for Work and Pensions with regard to benefit claims. 18% were made to the Gloucestershire County Council Adult and Social Care Helpdesk.

42% of referrals were classed as 'other', these include Carers Gloucestershire, Citizen's Advice Bureau, Careline, Gloucestershire County Association for the Blind, Guide and Pals, and the Warm and Well scheme. A large proportion of 'other' referrals will also be related to social activities that do not fall into a particular category and general support for clients, accounting for a large proportion of Village and Community Agent time.

During quarter 1 the top five agencies that Village and Community Agents made referrals to are shown in the chart and table below.

Referrals - Issues Arising



Agency or Organisation	Number of Referrals
Adult Social Care Helpdesk	95
Gloucestershire Fire & Rescue	40
Age UK	36
DWP Benefits	27
Care & Repair	23

In addition to referrals made to agencies, Village and Community Agents are also asked to record additional activity undertaken such as any information given out via leaflet or by telephone; this can include telephone numbers of organisations, or information on where to get advice and help. They are also asked to provide

information relating to follow up visits to clients that they may have helped in the past, and social events that they may have organised this activity is recorded as 'other'. This work does not require a referral to an agency, however Village and Community Agents are asked to fill in a 'gateway' form in order to ascertain the nature of their signposting or help. The breakdown of these issues is shown below

Issue	Number of Referrals	Percentage
Health	63	15%
Social/leisure	43	10%
Social Care	36	8%
Housing	36	8%
Benefits	22	5%
Transport	21	5%
Support group/charity	10	2%
Caring	9	2%
Community Group	9	2%
Volunteering	6	1%
Council	4	1%
Other	169	39%

5.0 VILLAGE AGENT CASE STUDY

CASE STUDY

My initial contact with Mr P was made in May '08. I was visiting his neighbour at the time and she suggested that I introduce myself to Mr P who she said was a very private man, living on his own, but she felt might benefit from knowing about the services I could provide. Mr P took my card but said he was fine.

I received a call from another neighbour in November '08 saying that Mr P had no phone and had asked if I'd call on him. Mr P had kept all his correspondence from over a year (including mail shots etc) and asked me to go through it with him. He was 75, lived since 1976 in the same council house, and was a widower. The furniture was sparse and basic, and the property was run down and shabby. Mr P's speech is very unclear and hard to decipher, possibly due to long term hearing problems. I was unsure if Mr P could read, or how much of what I said was fully understood by him. I spoke to GRCC regarding adult literacy help available.

Dec '08; contacted via Mr P's neighbour. This time Mr P had a specific problem he wanted help with. He wanted to renew his driving licence but had had the forms returned as they'd been filled in incorrectly. We redid them and sorted the rest of the correspondence. Mr P was in full receipt of housing benefit but was confused because he had letters from the council outlining that he owed "0" for the year. He was very anxious that this was wrong and that he would need to pay a large sum of rent at some point. He was afraid to plant flowers in his garden as he was convinced that he would be evicted for non payment of rent. He was having problems sleeping because of the worry. I called the housing department on his behalf and reassured him that he owed nothing!

Mr P had no transport so we went together to get a passport photo for his driving licence and sent it off. I asked why he wanted it renewed and he felt it might be handy if he took up driving work again. The money would be handy. I told Mr P that I was concerned about how out of breath he was and asked when he'd last seen his GP. I asked permission to make an appointment for him while we were together.

There was a letter re renewing Mr P's TV licence; I informed them that he no longer had to pay due to his age.

March '09; call via neighbour requesting visit. Mr P's health was declining and he was being treated at Gloucester Royal for bladder problems and having investigations re his breathing problems. I discussed getting a Life line installed and arranged a home visit to assess how to get help with installing a landline as it will need a phone connection. When it was discovered that Mr P would have to cover the cost of getting the phone in, he decided that he wouldn't take the matter any further.

A referral was made to Age UK for an Attendance Allowance assessment (later turned down).

I called the District Council regarding getting his door and gate repaired and arranged a site inspection.

I was struck on that visit that Mr P still had the Village Agent Christmas card I'd sent, on his mantle piece. He was very proud of it and it continued to stay there for the following year.

April'09; called in to see how Mr P was doing. He was still very anxious about his finances. He was already in receipt of full council tax credit and pension credit. Looking through his paying in book for water, he was paying over £30 per month. As his water consumption was very low, I suggested that we investigate the possibility of having a water meter installed through Water Sure with Severn Water. It was suggested that he might save about £95 per annum. Installation arranged for May'09. Responded to correspondence from the Council, to come to replace electrics.

Mr P changed his mind about the water meter when the engineer came; he was a little confused having had a variety of people come from the council.

March '10; the digital switchover was about to take place and I knew that it was unlikely that Mr P would have responded to the mail out. Mr P was overwhelmed when I explained that he would be able to have a digibox installed for free under the BBC and government scheme. We arranged a day for the engineer to come and I managed to convince Mr P to agree to have another appointment to have a water meter installed.

April '10; I received a call from the Severn Trent engineer to say that they had discovered an on-going leak which needed urgent attention from the council; I arranged this.

September '10. I spent 3 ½ hours yesterday on my visit to Mr P, made at his request. As soon as I went into his sitting room I saw the Cancer Handbook that we'd been given in our McMillan training. He had his pile of mail waiting for me as usual; the first few were all hospital appointments. He was very worried about one with a speech and language therapist which was to do with looking at how he would have to manage to clean the tube in his throat which would be there following a laryngectomy. He couldn't understand why this couldn't be done by a district nurse. Mr P thought he had he lung cancer but when I spoke to his key worker, it transpired it is throat cancer. If Mr P is unable to clear this tube, he won't be able to have his surgery. I have offered to take him to the meeting where he'll meet another person who has one in place, to try and help him understand what is required. The key worker had contacted the Adult Help Desk to ask for relevant information regarding social care etc to be sent to Mr P, but I explained that this was of no use due to the possible literacy issues. She now has my telephone number. We also discussed that there was now more urgent need for Mr P to have some sort of tele communication especially if he has surgery, he'll be unable to talk initially. Mr P has agreed, and I am in the process of trying to find the best solution for him;

- a BT installation + Care Line and possible help from a charity such as the Barnwood Trust to pay for the engineers visit (£130)., or
- Purchasing a mobile phone
- Purchasing a mobile phone and have Telecare using a GSM lifeline.

Mr P was very happy with his water meter and was now paying £10 per month instead of £31, a saving of £250 per year. He had mislaid his new pay-in book, so I ordered another. We cleared 6 months of correspondence and in the course of doing this, again I needed to reassure him that the council sent him his statement to say he owed zero pounds as a matter of course and he would not be getting a bill. I asked for permission to refer him again to Age UK for an Attendance Allowance assessment as he had the diagnosis of throat cancer and his breathing problems were also making it harder to do everyday tasks.

We went to the GP surgery to collect his prescription for his inhalers and on to the pharmacy and Post Office, and I called in on his neighbour to update her (with Mr P's permission), on what I'd done. She is very happy to be a contact for a life line if required. I also mentioned to her that I'd suggested she had a spare key or the possible installation of a key safe if Mr P became more unwell. We can discuss this again when need be.

Mr P has no family that I am aware of but his young neighbour has been taking him to the hospital when she can and who does some occasional shopping etc. Despite this good relationship, he likes to keep his personal details and financial matters private and entrusts me to read his mail and to explain what he needs to do. This is another example of the special role a Village Agent can have in the community.

14/09/10

* The District Council have agreed to pay £100 towards the installation fee of a BT line, with proof of payment. Having discussed the matter with his neighbour, the mobile phone was not an option as Mr P probably would be unable to use it. There are also running cost implications with Telecare as all the calls are charged to the mobile.