

Village Agents

■ Summary



Bath & North East Somerset Council identified a need to improve access to services within the more rural areas of the district, and in particular, reduce the affects of isolation for more vulnerable people. In 2009, the Council commissioned Community Action to run a pilot 'Village Agents' scheme. The project has aimed to bridge the gap left by the lack of local networks for isolated people in rural areas and provide a focal point for help and assistance between people in the community and statutory and/or voluntary organisations.

The project covers the parishes of Bishop Sutton, Chew Magna, Chew Stoke, Compton Martin, East Harptree, Nempnett Thrubwell, Norton Malreward, Stanton Drew, Stowey Sutton, Ubley and West Harptree.

■ The problems and how we tackled them



During the snowy weather over the Christmas and New Year period 2010, the Agents stepped in to help a number of older people who were worried about their normal care being reduced or concerned about keeping warm. These referrals were passed on by the local Police, neighbours or family members who identified those people who they considered to be vulnerable. People were put in touch with services that could provide direct support and home visits were made to the most isolated parts of the area.

Since then, the agents scheme has started in earnest with contact made with every Parish Council in the area, and agents visited local lunch groups and other groups to publicise their work.

■ Outcomes and impact



Since January, over 43 requests to assist have been received resulting in 75 onward referrals to 26 different agencies.

Denise Perrin, Village Agent Co-ordinator said:

"There is a sense of relief from people when they pass on their concerns about their family members, neighbours or friends. Agencies too have responded well to having a local presence and recognise that we are picking up many needs and hidden requirements".

PC Simon Glanfield, Neighbourhood Beat Manager for the Chew Valley said:

"During the recent snow we were able to highlight individuals who had called us for assistance and pass them on to the Village Agents, who are providing a vital link to other services that we would not normally access. This partnership is already proving to be an asset in providing a strengthened Neighbourhood Beat Team for the community and we look forward to an ongoing collaboration."

■ Who was involved?

SWAN (ACRE) now manages the Village Agent Scheme and employs a part-time Co-ordinator and two part-time Agents (10 hours a week each). They work closely with Parish Councils, local voluntary and community organisations and groups, advice agencies (incl CAB, Age Concern, Off the Record) and public services including Bath and North East Somerset, the Police and Fire and Rescue Service.

■ Next steps

The Council is working to identify future funding options to continue the pilot beyond October 2010.

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