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# Village Agents Pilot Project July 2006 to June 2008

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Providing older  
people with easier  
access to services  
and information

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# VILLAGE AGENTS

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

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## 1.0 VILLAGE AGENTS – AN OVERVIEW

The Village Agent project began as a pilot scheme funded by the Department for Work and Pensions (LinkAge Plus) and aimed to provide older people in Gloucestershire's rural communities with easier access to information and services. This report focuses on the pilot phase of the project from July 2006 to June 2008.

### Who is involved?

Gloucestershire County Council in partnership with Gloucestershire Rural Community Council (GRCC). GRCC, established in 1923 enables sustainable community development and empowers community groups not only through its project work but also through its team of district based rural advisers who offer general advice and support to rural communities on community and parish planning, funding, capacity building, project development and management. We also have a 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 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 rural communities Village Agents act as facilitators in the provision of high quality information, promote access to a wide range of services, and identify unmet need within their community. Through training and access to appropriate information resources, the Village Agents 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 is offered primarily to older people, but other disadvantaged and isolated people are also able to receive Village Agent support. Village Agents are CRB checked, they are in a

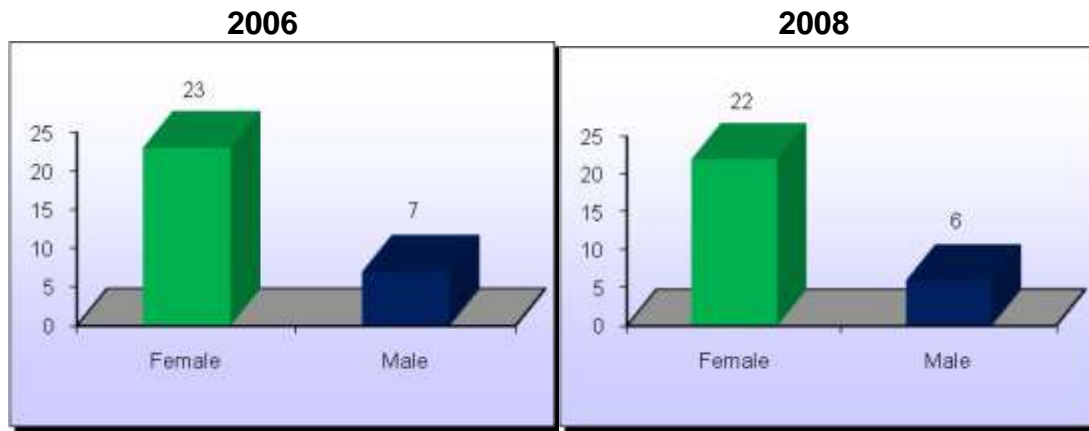
position to visit older people both in their own homes and by running regular surgeries in suitable locations, i.e. village halls, doctor's surgeries etc. Equipped with a laptop and mobile phone, they can access information and give immediate information to their client base.

### Cost per year/funding

The project originally received funding from Linkage Plus (part of the Department for Work and Pensions) for just under £1,000,000 for the duration of the pilot. This funding was split between the County Council as lead partner and GRCC as project deliverer. Project Managers are employed by both GRCC and County Council to work on specific elements of this countywide initiative.

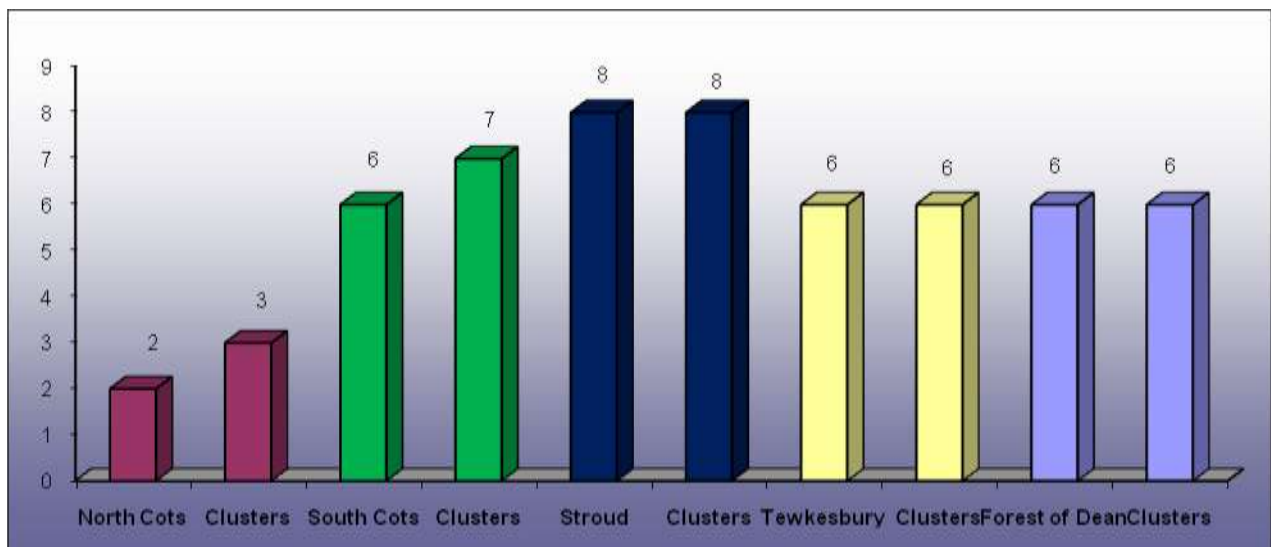
## 2.0 VILLAGE AGENTS – THE DEMOGRAPHIC PICTURE

The village agents come from a variety of backgrounds and range in age from 35 to 70.



### Spread of Village Agents by District

The chart below shows the number of Village Agents per district and the number of 'clusters' of parishes to date (July 2008). In the North Cotswolds two Village Agents work in three areas and in the South Cotswolds six Village Agents work in seven areas.



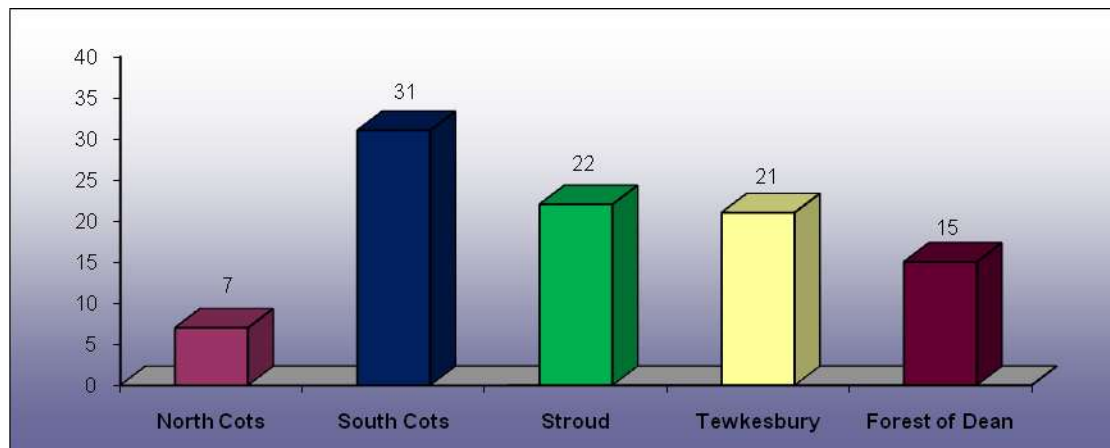
*Column 1 in each series denotes the number of agents in each area, column 2, the number of 'clusters' in each area.*

## Spread of Parishes Covered by Village Agents

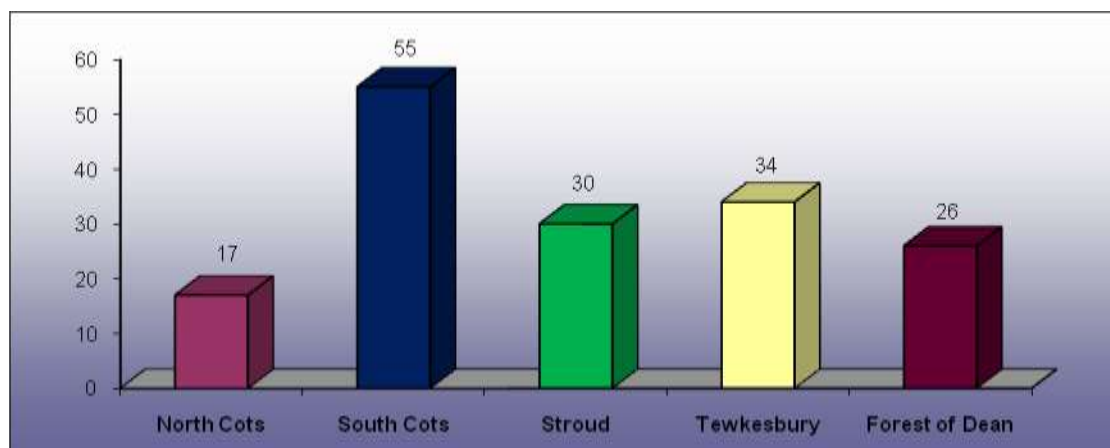
In 2006 when the project began Village Agents worked in 96 parishes across rural Gloucestershire. In 2008 this has grown to 162. These 162 parishes contain approximately 40,000 people aged 50+ (source: Gloucestershire County Council mid-2005 estimates, published November 2006).

The parishes were originally mapped by analysing existing services available, transport links and areas of deprivation. As the project progressed however new parishes were added on recommendations from both Village Agents and agencies.

### 2006 – Number of Original Parishes by District



### 2008 – Number of Parishes by District (to date June 2008)



Below is a list of all parishes initially included in the scheme (by district)



### **ORIGINAL PARISHES**

#### **North Cotswolds:**

1. Willersley
2. Aston Subedge
3. Weston Subedge
4. Saintbury
5. Evenlode
6. Mangersbury
7. Oddington

#### **South Cotswolds**

8. Dowdeswell
9. Withington
10. Compton Abdale
11. Chedworth
12. Yanworth
13. Hampnett
14. Winson
15. Coln St Dennis
16. Windrush
17. Aldsworth
18. Coln St Aldwyn's
19. Quenington
20. Hatherop
21. Ampney Crucis
22. Ampney St Mary
23. Preston
24. Baunton
25. Bagendon
26. Daglingworth
27. Duntisbourne Abbots
28. Duntisbourne Rouse
29. Winstone
30. Brimpsfield
31. Elkstone
32. Coberley
33. Cowley
34. Kingscote
35. Ozleworth
36. Boxwell with Leighterton
37. Westonbirt with Lasborough
38. Didmarton

#### **Stroud**

39. Kingswood
40. Alderley
41. Hillersley & Tresham
42. North Nibley
43. Stinchcombe

44. Ham & Stone
45. Alkington
46. Hamfallow
47. Slimbridge
48. Frocester
49. Nymphsfield
50. Horsley
51. Fretherne with Saul
52. Moreton Valence
53. Longney with Empney
54. Elmore
55. Brookthorpe with Whaddon
56. Haresfield
57. Harescombe
58. Pitchcombe
59. Whiteshill & Ruscombe
60. Randwick

#### **Forest of Dean**

61. Kempley
62. Oxenhall
63. Gorsley & Kilcot
64. Taynton
65. Tibberton
66. Churcham
67. Rudford
68. Upleadon
69. Pauntley
70. Littledean
71. Blaisdon
72. Lydbrook
73. Staunton Coleford
74. St Briavels
75. Hewelsfield & Brockweir

#### **Tewkesbury**

76. Maisemore
77. Longford
78. Sandhurst
79. Norton
80. Hasfield
81. Tirley
82. Chaceley
83. Down Hatherley
84. Staverton
85. Boddington
86. Leigh
87. Elmstone Hardwicke
88. Uckington
89. Stoke Orchard
90. Oxenton
91. Teddington
92. Alderton
93. Stanway
94. Stanton
95. Buckland
96. Snowhill

Village Agents Project July 2006-June 2008 – Pilot Phase [www.villageagents.org.uk](http://www.villageagents.org.uk)

Below is a list of all parishes added since October 2006 (to date July 2008)



**North Cotswolds:**

- 97. Temple Guiting
- 98. Guiting Power
- 99. Cutsdean
- 100. Condicote
- 101. Swell
- 102. Cold Aston
- 103. Adlestrop
- 104. Mickleton

**South Cotswolds**

- 105. North Cerney
- 106. Rencombe
- 107. Colesbourne
- 108. Syde
- 109. Siddington
- 110. Meyseyhampton
- 111. Ampney St Peter
- 112. Andoversford
- 113. Severnhampton
- 114. Shipton Oliffe
- 115. Whittington
- 116. Edgeworth
- 117. Tetbury Upton
- 118. Shipton Moyne
- 119. Avening
- 120. Poulton
- 121. Hazleton
- 122. Turkdean
- 123. Bibary
- 124. Barrington
- 125. Sapperton
- 126. Coates
- 127. Eastleach
- 128. Southrop
- 129. Naunton
- 130. Notgrove

**Stroud**

- 131. Arlingham
- 132. Hinton
- 133. Hardwicke
- 134. Cranham
- 135. Uley
- 136. Edge
- 137. Owlpen

**Forest of Dean**

- 138. Westbury on Severn
- 139. Staunton (Gloucester)
- 140. Corse
- 141. Tiddenham
- 142. Newland
- 143. Dymock
- 144. Huntley
- 145. Hartpur
- 146. Redmarley
- 147. Mitcheldean
- 148. Longhope

**Tewkesbury**

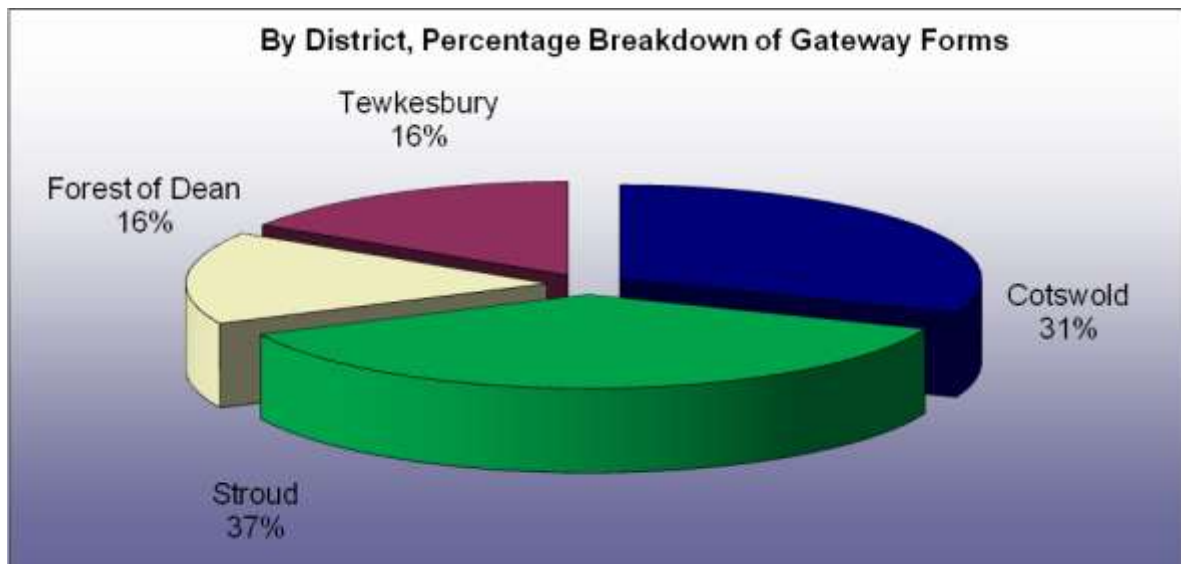
- 149. Ashleworth
- 150. Minsterworth
- 151. Dumbleton
- 152. Deerhurst
- 153. Hignham
- 154. Twigworth
- 155. Toddington
- 156. Gretton
- 157. Prescott
- 158. Gotherington
- 159. Bishops Cleeve
- 160. Sudeley
- 161. Hawling
- 162. Forthampton

### 3.0 REFERRALS

After each visit a Village Agent makes, they are required to fill in an online 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.

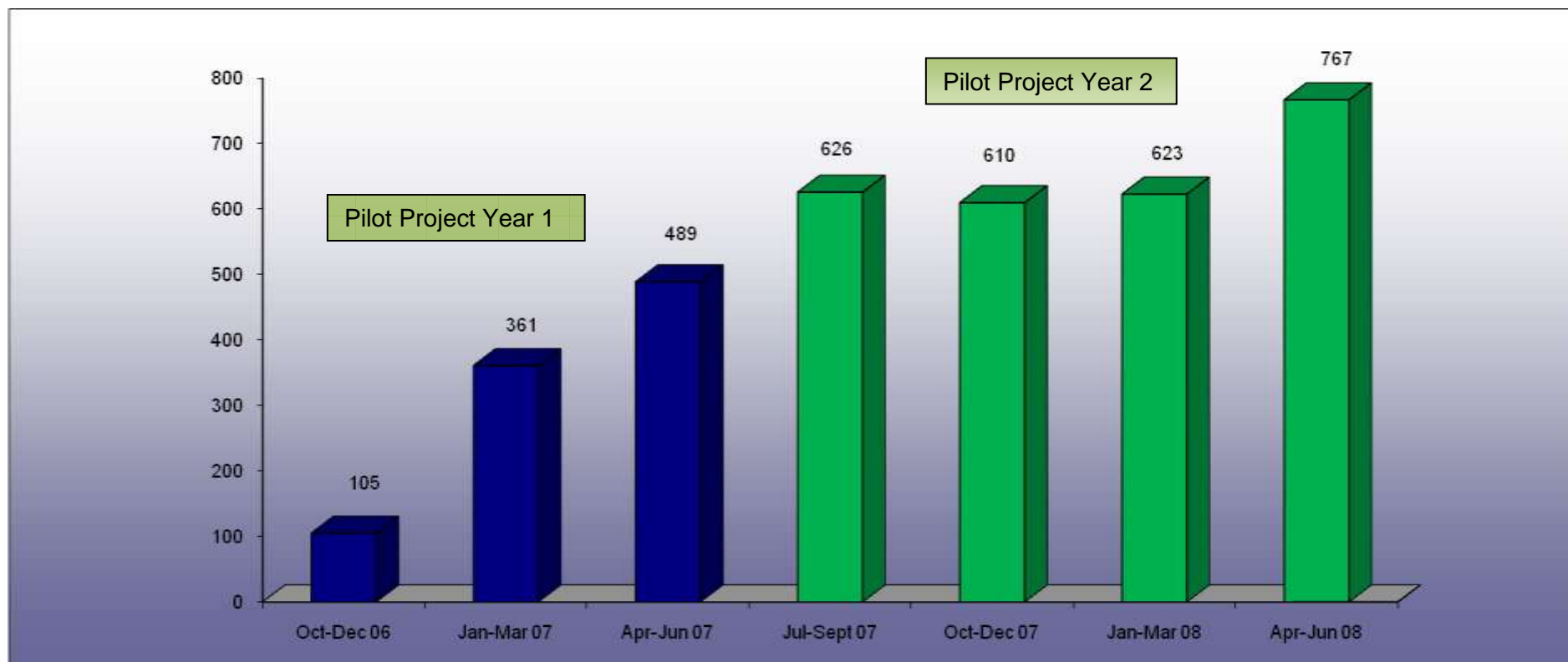


Since the gateway system was introduced in December 2006 a total of **3,476** have been submitted (mid June 2008). A percentage breakdown by district is shown below. Please note that the Tewkesbury and Forest of Dean Agents were operational three months after the first phase of Cotswold and Stroud.



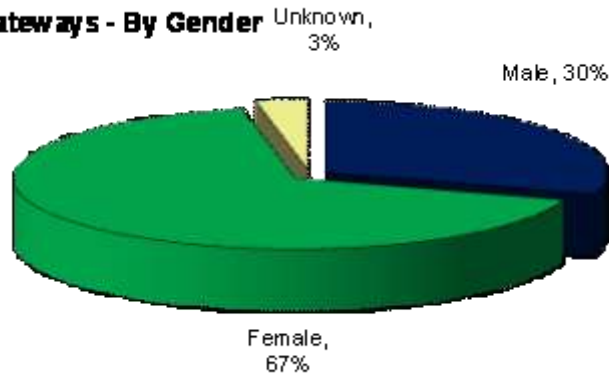
As would be expected, Stroud and Cotswold District Village Agents have produced the largest numbers of gateway forms. Starting their employment 3 months before the Tewkesbury and Forest of Dean Agents, Cotswold District has 10 'clusters', Stroud, 8 'clusters', Forest of Dean 6 'clusters' and Tewkesbury, 6 'clusters'.

Referrals saw a steady increase, quarter by quarter in the first year of the Village Agents pilot scheme. This was followed by a period of levelling out before a sharp increase in the last quarter of the pilot (April to June 2008) of 19%.



Through the gateway form, Village Agents are able to collect demographic data relating to their clients, this has been collated and is shown in the charts overleaf. *Please note that some of the clients will be repeat clients so there is an element of double counting, this however should not dramatically affect the results proportionately.*

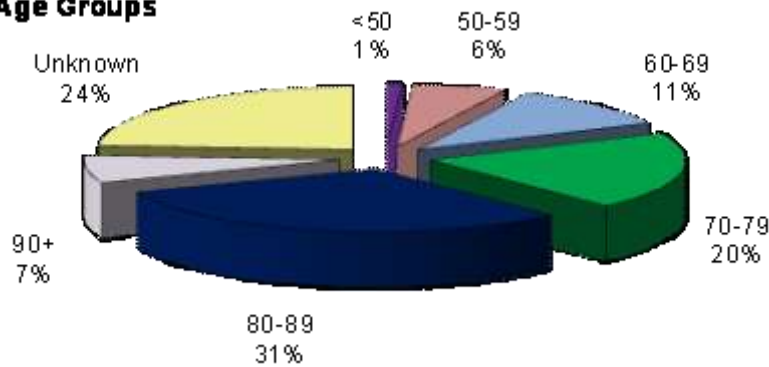
**Gateways - By Gender**



The majority (67%) of clients seen by Village Agents are female

This in context is in part to be expected as over half (approximately 55%) of Gloucestershire's over 50 population are female. (ONS statistics)  
*Unknown – Client anonymous*

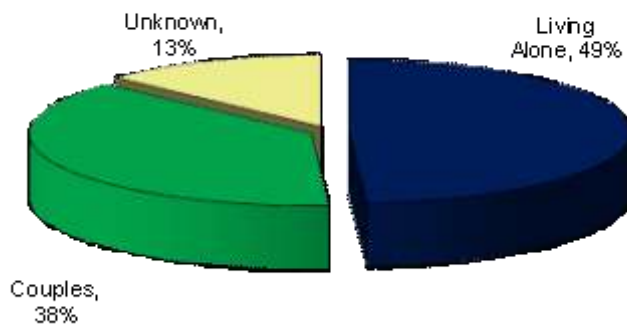
**Age Groups**



The largest numbers of gateway forms have been completed for the 80-89 age-group (31%)

*Unknown – Client anonymous*

**Gateways - Living Status**



Almost half (49%) of clients seen by Village Agents live alone

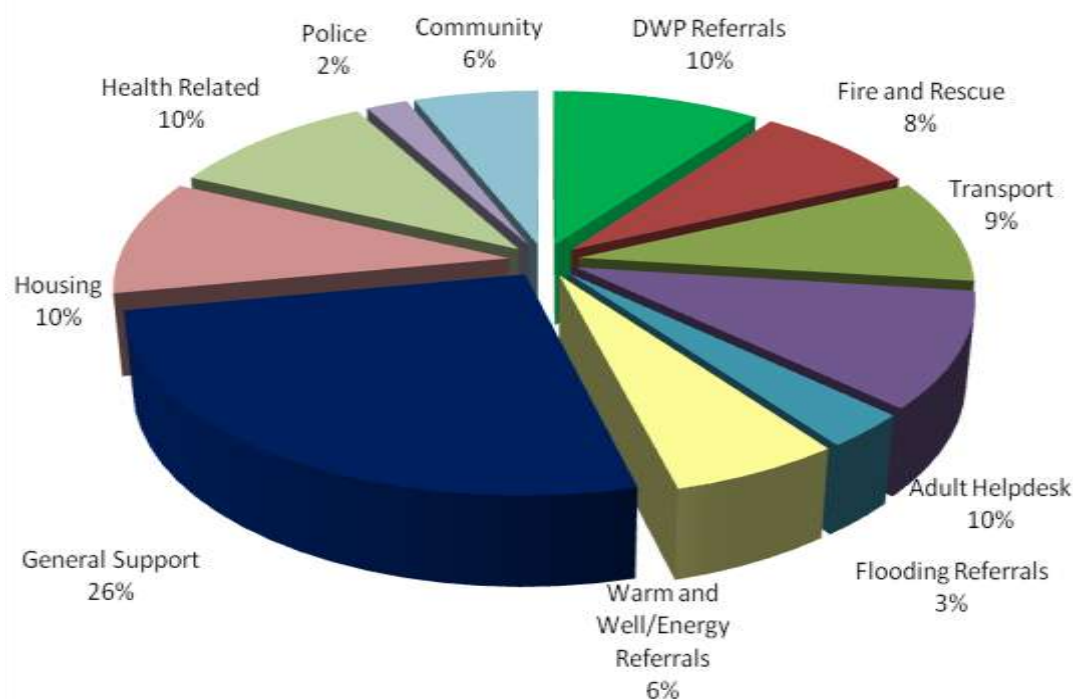
*Unknown – Client anonymous*

## 4.0 ISSUES ARISING

The issues that have arisen for Village Agents have been varied, but common themes have occurred around the county. The chart below is made up of the top 11 referrals since the gateway form was introduced.

Out of the top referrals the largest area of Village Agent work is centred on general support and information giving (26%). This could be in the form of a home visit or a telephone call and also by attending lunch clubs and holding 'surgeries'.

Department for Work and Pensions referrals in the form of pension enquiries and assessments account for 10% as do health related issues, social care support through the Adult Help Desk and housing issues, this also includes referrals to home improvement agencies.



Transport, accounting for 9% of the referrals above is an important issue for rural parishes and Village Agents have liaised with both District and County Council representatives to try and improve the situation for their particular parishes. One example of the partnership working was illustrated in the Forest of Dean district where a Village agent worked closely with the appropriate agencies to get a bus stop reinstated.

Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue have been a constant support to the Village Agents and have fitted smoke alarms and completed home safety checks on hundreds of rural properties in the county through the gateway system (8%). The Warm and Well scheme have been integral in helping people to access grants and helping to make their homes more energy efficient (6%).

Community – this includes the support and setting up of social activities and promoting volunteering in the local areas (6%)

## 5.0 TRAINING

Following their recruitment days, the new Village Agents for Cotswold and Stroud undertook the first phase of training as one group. Two days were held in Gloucester with training from The Fire Service, Police/Neighbourhood Watch, Care and Repair, The Pensions Service, Age Concern, Gloucestershire PCT and Warm and Well. This training from was held at Community House.



Time was also spent at Shire Hall gathering information about the Adult Help Desk and Social Care.

The training of the Village Agents is ongoing with a trainer/service provider introduced each month. Each Agent is also responsible for building up a robust knowledge of their own area to provide essential baseline data and to contribute this information to a gateway website which is available to view at [www.villageagents.org.uk](http://www.villageagents.org.uk)

In the week beginning 8<sup>th</sup> January 2007 the Forest of Dean and Tewksbury Village Agents underwent their initial training with speakers from the Police, Age Concern, Anchor Staying Put, Affordable Warmth, Fire and Rescue and the PCT. Training was also given from GRCC and Gloucestershire County Council over a whole day. This training, as with the Cotswold and Stroud Village Agents is ongoing with monthly meetings held at Community House (GRCC).



Village Agents meet on a monthly basis at Community House in Gloucester within their district groups. This enables a new trainer to be introduced and a discussion to take place between the Agents about the issues and problems that are arising within their specific areas.

Once a quarter at an outside venue a meeting is held that involves all the Agents from across the county, enabling cross district working and a chance to hear about the countywide initiatives and sharing of best practice.

## 6.0 ACHEIVEMENTS AND EVENTS

### VILLAGE AGENT PROJECT LAUNCHES



26<sup>th</sup> October 2006 saw the official launch of the Village Agent scheme in the Cotswold and Stroud areas. In view of the project targeting the most rurally isolated communities it was felt that the launch should represent this.

A coach was hired to tour the area beginning at North Nibley in the Stroud District and finishing in Oddington in the North Cotswolds with Cotswold Country Fayre in Chedworth the ideal place to greet people for lunch. The day was extremely successful with each venue and community approaching the day in differing ways. Each Village Agent was instrumental in organising local people from their parishes to come along and enjoy either the whole day or just for an hour or two.



In March 2007 the second phase of the Village Agent project was launched in the Forest of Dean and Tewkesbury

A minibus toured through the two districts stopping in Brockweir for morning coffee, at Longford for lunch and ending the day in Stanton. The day was a big success with local people, Village Agents and service providers all in attendance to discuss the project and to enjoy the day.

## GLOUCESTERSHIRE FLOODS JULY 2007

July witnessed the worst flooding to hit Gloucestershire in living memory with many communities in Tewkesbury and the Cotswold districts completely cut off from the outside world. After the initial rain had stopped thousands of homes were left without running water for almost two weeks and many initially without power. After the flood water finally receded, the total scale of the damage could be assessed.



Below are a few examples of how the Village Agents rallied round to help their communities in need, this not only happened with the initial floods but also in the aftermath. This list is by no means exhaustive but details the most common areas of assistance.

- Making sure older people have water and are heeding the advice of the authorities with regards to personal health
- Finding out about the locations of bowsers and laundrettes in the locality
- Assisting communities in arranging for bowsers to be delivered and replenished
- Phoning round to key contacts in the villages giving out the county council emergency helpline number
- Delivering milk and bread and other staple goods
- Over the weekend some have been getting involved in working parties to distribute water and this is continuing
- Offering help to other parts of the county, those with 4 x 4's and plenty of water are willing to go where necessary
- General ringing round to their existing clients to make sure that everything is okay on a daily basis

There was also a great deal of feedback from agencies and local authorities on the important role the Village Agents had played throughout the crisis, one in particular is shown below:

'I would like to record my personal appreciation for the work that Mike did in the communities of Coberley, Cowley and surrounding areas following the flooding and especially the loss of the Severn Trent water supply to Parishes on the western edge of the District. He kept in touch with us, gave us updates regularly and more importantly, ferried copious supplies of bottled water from distribution centres in Cheltenham to the most needy in his area of action. We had a real struggle ensuring that bowsers were despatched to those places but Mike filled the breach at a critical time and with calmness and good humour too. What an asset he is to your team!'

Les Haines Cotswold District Council

## FLOOD HEROES

On 3<sup>rd</sup> December two Village Agents were invited to a reception at Lancaster House in London for 'local flood heroes' attended by Gordon Brown and hosted by John Healey (Floods Recovery Minister). Jane Griffiths Village Agent in one of the worst hit areas, Tewkesbury Borough was nominated by Gloucestershire County Council and Mike Bone, Village Agent in the Cotswold's by Cotswold District Council for the roles that they played in the aftermath of the July floods. Other nominees included ordinary members of



the community as well as representatives of the RNLI, RSPCA, HM Coastguard, British Red Cross, Fire and Rescue Service, police and armed forces, social and council services and others. Both Jane and Mike work tirelessly throughout the period making sure that people were well stocked with food and that the older residents of their parishes were not in any danger, that communities had access to

browsers and bottled water and that people knew where to go for reliable information and services. Both were given a framed certificate signed by Gordon Brown. Congratulations to Jane and Mike but also to all of the Village Agents some of whose homes were also flooded but who gave assistance and support to their parishes and continue to do so.

## NATIONAL CUSTOMER SERVICE AWARDS 2007

In October 2007 Village Agents were finalists in the National Customer Service Awards.



An annual event, Village Agents, despite only having been operational for a year saw off competition from agencies from all over the country to make the final 4 in the 'Customer Service Team of the Year – Public Services and Education' category. The project was cited as 'a great example of multi-agency working and as a project was launched with speed and panache.....' The category was won by

Merseyside Police but everyone was immensely proud of getting so far.

6 Village Agents plus the management team made the trip to London to the awards ceremony held at the Grosvenor House Hotel to represent the project.

## INTERNATIONAL OLDER PEOPLES DAY: VILLAGE AGENT AWARDS 2007

On October 1<sup>st</sup> 2007 to coincide with International Older People's Day the first Village Agent awards ceremony was held to celebrate the achievements of older people across Gloucestershire. Over 100 people attended the afternoon to see people receive awards in the following categories:

Special Achievement Award
Community - Lunch Club
Community - Husband & Wife
Community - Individual
Community - Volunteer
Community - Group
Challenge
Carer
Employment
Sport - Oldest Sports Player
Sport - Male Winner
Sport - Female Winner

Nominations were received from all over the county and alongside the 12 'winners', 22 highly commended awards were presented.



September 2008 sees the awards repeated as part of the Gloucestershire 'Full of Life' event and Village Agents will again recognise the contribution that older people make to society.

## CHRISTMAS ACTIVITIES

Through December 2006 and 2007 Village Agents worked hard in their communities to include everyone and make the Christmas period as enjoyable as possible. A number of agents arranged carol concerts/services utilising sheltered housing complexes, local churches and community halls, these were all extremely well attended and very much appreciated. One lady commented that she had not been to a carol service for over ten years and now had the opportunity to.



Other activities that were arranged by Village Agents included lunches out with transport and entertainment arranged and at the beginning of December a poetry evening was held which proved so successful that more are planned for the future.

## ‘MEET THE DRAGONS’

Meet the Dragons was an initiative devised by The Learning Set – a group of Social Care leaders, to highlight innovation in social care. Village Agents successfully won through to the final five projects which all went forward into the ‘Dragons Den’. The final five and were all successful in achieving funding and consultancy support to take their ideas further. Village Agents were presented with their award of £10,000 in funding and £40,000 worth of support from ‘?What If!’, the Innovation Foundation. David Behan, the Director General of Social Care, who gave out the award was very complimentary about the project and said it was the kind of service he would like to see rolled out across the whole country.

## COMMUNITY AGENTS

Community Agents are following in the footsteps of Village Agents in order to facilitate access to services for the over 50s, provide high quality information and test the limit of holistic working by joining up services. Community Agents have funding for 6 months from January to June 2008. The role of the Community Agent is to become a trusted member of the community, so that people will approach them and recommend the service.



6 Community Agents have been appointed:

- 1 County Agent for Chinese community
- 1 Gujarati speaking Agent for the county and Cheltenham
- 1 Bengali speaking for Cheltenham and the county
- 1 for the Polish community
- 1 African Caribbean for Cheltenham, Tewkesbury and The Forest of Dean
- 1 African Caribbean for Gloucester City, Stroud District and Cotswold District

One example of how a Community Agent is working is shown below:  
e.g. “a gentleman who is living in his hallway as this is the only ‘room’ that is heated. No inside toilet! They are very enthusiastic about starting community groups to encourage social activities and we are sourcing funding from different areas for this e.g. In Touch, Adult Education.....”

## 7.0 CASE STUDIES

The following pages illustrate some of the fantastic work that Village Agents do on a regular basis (adapted for anonymity).

### Case Study 1

“I have worked with several members of a thriving social club, covering a wide variety of cases, over the past 12 months. The members enjoy various activities and entertainments and good home-cooked food, with the option of taking an extra portion home for the next day.

This is a selection of cases I have dealt with from the social club in one of my parishes. I was chatting to a new member last week, who is full-time carer for his wife. The group organiser had given me a nod that they may be in need of some help. Sure enough, I received a call from the husband that evening, and am going to see them at home next week. I understand that he has several issues to discuss. After 12 months in the job, nothing I get asked about surprises me. I enjoy the challenge of finding answers, and certainly get a buzz from being ‘hands on’ and seeing the results.

Mrs H. – I took Mrs H along with me the first time I visited the group, as she had become increasingly depressed during the winter months, having been virtually housebound. Since her first visit, she has been a regular member of this and another group, and this social inclusion has been of enormous benefit to her. Along the way, another Village Agent and I have enabled her to claim extra benefits and Pension Credits, had Occupational Therapy Assessments resulting in Living Aids and Safety Grab Rails, helped her fill in forms and sort out paperwork, got Smoke Alarms and Sensor Lights fitted, had a water meter installed to save money, and got her nebuliser repaired as a matter of urgency.

Mrs M – Mrs M is in her mid 90’s, and when I first met her she asked if I could find her some information about a bath lift device. Although she could still manage to bathe, she was extremely concerned about the dangers of slipping and having an accident. I checked the device out on the internet, and spoke to Mrs M about the cost, which was a lot more than she had expected or could afford. I then suggested that I refer her for an OT assessment to see if she would be eligible to have her bath replaced with a shower. This took place, and Mrs V was promised that a walk-in shower would be installed. After a few months, nothing further had happened, so I contacted the housing association who promised to send someone out to do a survey. This was done, and Mrs M was told the work would go ahead.



Time passed and still nothing happened. I made further enquiries, and it appeared that an outside agency had been called in by Severn Vale to clear a backlog of cases, and this company had since ceased to exist.

I enlisted the help of the Adult Helpdesk, which led to a meeting at Mrs M's house with a gentleman from the OT team, who confirmed that the award had been made and promised to follow up the progress of the case with the relevant people. Mrs M is now delighted with her shower. I have also persuaded her to have a helpline, in view of the fact she worries about falling. She recently posed me another question – she has a hedge at the bottom of her garden which is getting out of control. She needed it cutting back to a reasonable height, partly because it was blocking her neighbour's view. I scratched my head a bit on this one, because I knew she wouldn't be able to afford a professional to come and do it.

I tried Anchor Staying Put but they weren't able to help, and then I happened to catch sight of an article in the Citizen about a Community Volunteer Group in Brockworth who had just purchased a hedge cutter to help them tidy up older people's gardens. A phone call to the group resulted in a contact for Action 4 Employment, who were only too happy to go and trim Mrs M's hedge, and remove the cuttings, for no charge. On my last visit to the club, Mrs M asked me about being able to use a laptop (she is writing a book!) and I am awaiting further information from the Age Concern MITS service.



Mrs P – another member of the club but living in a neighbouring village told me that while she was able to get to the Doctor's, as the bus would drop her off by the surgery, this wasn't a designated bus stop, so she was unable to catch the bus home as she couldn't walk to the official stop. I was able to put her in touch with a volunteer driver who is quite willing to take her to

appointments.

Mrs S – When I first met Mrs S, her husband had just gone into residential care, consequently, the domestic help she had from Social Services had ceased, but she wasn't able to manage on her own. She needed help to do a bit of ironing and a spot of assisted shopping. I managed to find someone through Age Concern Clean Sweep Plus. This arrangement is working very well. Before Christmas, I took Mrs S's electric blanket to Age Concern for safety checking. It failed the test, and was replaced with a new one, which she was extremely pleased with. Following the death of her husband, she has recently been clearing out his clothes, but can't manage to get them to a Charity Shop on her own. I know of a local school that are collecting bags of clothes which will help them raise funds, and I have promised Mrs S that I will collect her bags and take them to the collection point. Mrs S is also a regular passenger on my Minibus Minitrips, which she particularly enjoys as she is unable to get out and about on her own.

Mrs E – I met Mrs E for the first time recently. She was desperately worried about her husband who is in constant pain following a series of treatments and operations, and she didn't know what course of action to take. I did some research and phoned Mrs E with details of the pain clinic at the hospital, but I emphasised that the referral must be made through their GP. I received a phone call later, thanking me for my concern, she had taken her husband to the GP, and they had an appointment for the clinic the following week.

## Case Study 2

Mrs VB.

Whilst at a Parish Council meeting I was invited by a lady to visit her as she had a question she wanted to put to me.

Mrs B is a lady in her fifties suffering from MS and uses crutches. She has a 'Muscle stimulator' on her right leg. This is a device to overcome a 'dropped foot' so that she is able to walk easier. She had to purchase the device herself and needs new pads quite often. These are small pads fitted to her leg and ankle which the stimulator is connected to.



As she had not yet paid for the device she wanted to know if VAT would have to be paid on the device and the pads. She had been sent a form by the suppliers asking for her to give details of her medical condition but was not sure what it was for.

I returned home and found information on the internet that this form was for self certifying evidence that would entitle the lady to VAT relief on the equipment. I visited

her again a few days later and explained this to her.

On leaving her home she accompanied me to the door, using her crutches. When we arrived at the front door she held onto the door by putting her hand between the door jam and the door surround. I pointed out that this was a bad thing to do because if the door slammed shut her hand would be trapped in the door. She said that this was the only way she could get down the step as it was too high for her.

With her permission I contacted Social Care through the Adult Help Line. The following morning I phoned Mrs B to explain what I had done and she told me that Social care had already been in touch with her and would be contacting her again. Five weeks later the ladies had the front and rear house steps adapted and grab handles fitted to the front and rear doors to her house. She has since told me that Social Care have returned with aids to assist getting dressed.

A very happy lady

### Case Study 3

Just recently I was contacted by a Stroud social worker to call in on a ninety-five year old lady living on her own. Sylvia (not her real name) is fiercely independent and I quickly discovered there was an art to getting her to accept help!



The one thing that really upset her to the point that she shed a few tears, was that she had an appointment at Gloucester Eye hospital for laser treatment to enable her to see sufficiently well so that she could read again. She had simply been told that the hospital could provide transport for her and was left to make the arrangements herself. She had no idea what to do and was frightened of missing

the appointment and how much it meant to her.

Apart from the transport itself, it concerned me that a lady of this age and fragility – she walks with a zimmer frame – would be alone in the hospital to find her own way, plus she would be unable to see properly for a while because of the eye-drops. Sylvia had phoned her son in Surrey and he was travelling up after work to spend the night with her, but there would be no company for the actual treatment. After a couple of “no, I can’t put you out like that” and “oh dear I wish I could do this myself” I finally persuaded her to let me take her, stay with her, bring her home and I also hung on until her son arrived. I’ve seen her since and she can now see – she’s absolutely thrilled and it was well worth giving my time to her.

### Case Study 4

Whilst our remit as a Village Agent is to offer help to anyone over fifty, most of our clients are usually retired and elderly, but once in a while we get the opportunity to be useful in a different way. Mike (not his real name) is such a case.

Mike was referred to me by the local Police Community Support Officer, as someone who was unemployed and desperately short of money; could I help with benefits advice etc. A long talk over a cup of coffee revealed the sad story that Mike’s wife had been killed in a terrible road accident nine months ago, leaving Mike with an eleven year old daughter. A combination of grief and being



unable to return to his old job as a lorry driver because of the hours involved, meant that he had been home ever since and was now selling household items to keep his head above water. He was finding life very difficult and couldn’t see a way out because of needing to be there for his child. On top of this, his car tax and insurance were due for renewal, he had no money to pay

for them and being in a very rural community, without a car or public transport his chances of finding any kind of work locally were almost nil.



The most pressing need was to get his benefits checked and try to keep his car on the road. A financial assessment was done and, on finding out that he was ex-army, I approached the British Legion to see if they would help regarding his car. Jane, my contact, was extremely helpful and arranged payment of the bills plus covering a gas bill that had just arrived.

I believed that Mike was a 'one-off' in the sense that, whilst a tragedy had occurred in his life, if I could find a way to get him back to work, he would need no more help. I decided to look into possible part-time employment through driver agencies, but first contacted the lone Parent Adviser at the local Job Centre to ensure that in taking a job, he would not end up worse off than he was already. Having approached several driver agencies, I learned of a part-time job which seemed ideal but having got Mike and the owner of the agency together, we discovered that Mike didn't have the necessary qualifications. It was explained to me that articulated lorry drivers – which is what the post needed - are 'top of the tree' and can more or less dictate their own employment conditions so this was the next challenge, to try and upgrade his certificates! I talked to the British Legion again and discovered that they have a re-training fund. With Jane's help, we applied and were granted the cost of the training and examination. We also kept in touch with the driver agency about the part-time vacancy as the starting time was 11am, giving Mike time to take his daughter to school before work. Although the finishing time was as late as 9pm, she could go to her grandmothers after school, so it was imperative to try to keep this opportunity open.

*Last week Mike finally took the exam and passed. Within hours, the job was confirmed and he started work this Monday. We have also contacted the Lone Parent Adviser again to ensure he takes full advantage of 'back to work' working tax credits etc. It's been a long road, but being told by Mike 'I couldn't have done it without you' has made it very worthwhile. Knowing you have turned someone's life around is a very special bonus.*

## Case Study 5



**It's Library Club but not as we know it** Libraries & Information have been frequently 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.

## 8.0 TESTIMONIALS

"We would just like to thank you so very much for not only coming to our PCC meeting but also attending our coffee morning. As you know about thirty people attended which is a huge turnout for a village of our size and everyone loved meeting you and was so impressed with the service you provide and the friendship you extended. All your contacts and help with various enquiries are already much



appreciated and several people are already getting problems solved. And I know the "network" factor will also mean you are reaching a much bigger catchment which is of course how these communities work. We also raised £100 for Comic Relief - so thank you so much for inspiring us! We know we will keep in touch and look forward to seeing you soon Very best Barbara.....And writing for all your new friends in Cutsdean.

*You are an amazing lady. Stair rail excellent. I'm running up and down like a goat on speed. How have I managed without it since 1970?*

*Can't thank you enough, will contact you again at the next stage of decrepitude.*

'I would like to record my personal appreciation for the work that Mike did in the communities of Coberley, Cowley and surrounding areas following the flooding and especially the loss of the Severn Trent water supply to Parishes on the western edge of the District. He kept in touch with us, gave us updates regularly and more importantly, ferried copious supplies of bottled water from distribution centres in Cheltenham to the most needy in his area of action. We had a real struggle ensuring that bowsers were despatched to those places but Mike filled the breach at a critical time and with calmness and good humour too. What an asset he is to your team!'

Many thanks for the update, really please to learn that multi-agency working is alive and kicking. This is an excellent piece of work and wonder whether this is, or should be considered as a best practice model for other Village Agents, supported by Neighbourhood Wardens and PCSO's? Perhaps this could be raised at your next Village Agent meeting?  
Please keep up the good work.

Myself and my Wife Carole are extremely grateful for the payment you have made to us. It has been a great help when trying to organise the basics in getting back to normal, although it will be next year before we are able to move back into our house.

I would like to thank Jane Griffiths, who has been very supportive and helpful, my Wife found it a great help talking to her. Once again many thanks

## 9.0 GLOUCESTERSHIRE VILLAGE AGENTS – THE FUTURE

From June 2008 Gloucestershire Village Agents will be mainstreamed as a service, with 3 year funding from Gloucestershire Primary Care Trust and Gloucestershire County Council.



The successful partnership between Gloucestershire County Council and Gloucestershire Rural Community Council will remain in place 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 will continue, collating demographic and numerical data using the existing gateway forms, with case studies and diaries providing anecdotal evidence.

Throughout the two year pilot phase, extensive evaluation took place and this led to a large amount of baseline data being collected through questionnaires and focus groups with service users. This information will be developed to provide important feedback to stakeholders involved in the scheme.

Village Agents will be involved in a number of important events in 2008/9 including the Gloucestershire Full of Life Event in September, and back this year due to popular demand is the countywide Village Agent Awards, held for the first time last year and featuring new categories.

Village Agents are currently undergoing refresher training with the agencies they liaise with via the gateway forms. The monthly meetings will continue and new agencies will be introduced over the coming months.

