

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Report

Committee:	Safe and Healthy People Select Committee		
Date:	18 September 2013		
Title:	Village Agents –The story so far		
Reference:	5185		
Report From:	Director of Adult Services		
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1. Purpose of report

- 1.1. This report provides an overview of the Village Agent Project in Hampshire.
- 1.2. The report will describe the project, set out the key objectives, the capacity and cost and issues for the future.

2. Contextual Information

- 2.1. The Village Agent Project supports the County Council's strategic aims to:
 - a. Maximise well-being
 - b. Make Hampshire safer and more secure for all
 - c. Enhancing quality of place
- 2.2 The joint Ageing Well in Hampshire - Older People's Wellbeing Strategy identified 5 key objectives; three of these are:
 - a. To ensure that older people can obtain the information they need when they need it
 - b. To support access to and increase the range of social & community activity
 - c. To identify opportunities to reach out into communities. This will include reaching out to hard to reach and isolated older people.
- 2.3 The Village Agent project meets these aims by recruiting volunteers who have a strong connection with their local community, or are able to develop this. These volunteers are tasked to meet these aims by providing information, developing the range of activities in their area and ensuring that people can access it including those people who may be socially isolated. In this way they support people to remain independent longer and enhance their quality of life.
- 2.4 The Village Agent project is led by the Older Persons Wellbeing Team, who have created the first volunteer based Village Agent service in the country.

The model is well recognised by other counties including Gloucestershire and Essex, which both run projects with salaried Village Agents. However, for reasons of economy as well as recognising the need to build a local sustainable model, Hampshire initiated a volunteer-based model for its pilot.

- 2.5 The Village Agents are not a stand-alone project. They form an important part of a wider approach to demand management that has been developed by the Prevention and Early Intervention sector, with the Adult Services Department. This includes work with other Hampshire County Council Departments and public and voluntary sector agencies.
- 2.6 Hampshire County Council funds Age Concern Hampshire to recruit, support and train the volunteers. The scheme is grant funded and costs £56k per annum in total, and includes a small sum for each village agent to offer one-off or seed funding for local initiatives. The other costs include the role of the co-ordinator, laptop, training costs and volunteer expenses.
- 2.7 The project was developed through an active inter-agency steering group which includes representation from the District Councils, Hampshire Fire and Rescue, Hampshire Association of Local Councils (parish), and Hampshire Association of Older People's Forums (older people themselves).
- 2.8 As part of the integrated approach to Prevention and Early Intervention, Village Agents have the ability to call on the expertise within Age Concern Hampshire, in particular the Information and Advice Line. Village Agents also link to their local Community Independence Teams (CIT) so that people who need it can access a more intensive service. They can discuss needs and interests with older people and, using HCC Care Choices websites and resources, print personalised 'My leaflet' information for use by the individual.
- 2.9 The Village Agent model was initially tested in Hampshire through a pilot project. This was volunteer-based and ran from March 2011 to June 2012, funded by Hampshire County Council Rural Development Fund. From July 2011 to January 2012 (6 months) the Village Agent pilot recruited twelve Village Agents, generated 440 volunteering hours, met a total of 1311 people and made over 50 referrals to other agencies.
- 2.10 The Village Agent project now consists of a network of local, rurally-based volunteers who pro-actively help older people (aged 55 year or self-defining as old) to find the information and support they need to stay independent. This includes the development of community infrastructure where necessary. Currently there are 31 Village Agents operating in 23 rural locations. They often volunteer in pairs and this has been found to be a popular and efficient means of support for the Village Agents themselves. The activity of Village Agents continues to increase and diversify, so for the 6 month period February to July 2013 the 31 active Village Agents generated 1,358 volunteering hours, met a total of 2,700 people of which 239 were 1-1 individual contracts, made 87 referrals to other agencies and carried out 16 Home Fire Safety visits.

3. Future development of Village Agent Model

- 3.1. The model is innovative and cost effective and makes great use of the skills of the voluntary & community sector which is so active in the county. The model, commissioned by HCC and run by a voluntary organisation (currently Age Concern Hampshire) with a Steering Group for oversight, has successfully reconfigured the Village Agent paid model in to a well-structured and supported volunteer model which is contributing to the levels of independence maintained by older people in rural areas of Hampshire.
- 3.2. The Village Agent model is replicable: Hampshire is a county with large rural swathes and Village Agents have so far been recruited in 28 villages (eg Kings Somborne, Froyle, Milford-on-Sea and Hamble). It is recognised that some areas of population are smaller and more isolated so we have initiated the 'Hampshire Hamlet' Village Agents in order to offer the older people living in these area the same level of support provided to village residents. This work is in its infancy, and it may be that the existing Village Agents are able to extend their reach to include outlying hamlets.

4. Outcomes

- 4.1. From the beginning it was important to attempt to measure the impact of the Village Agent project. To this end, Age Concern Hampshire has collected many individual 'Outcome Stories'. Reflections from the Village Agents themselves have also been collected, and the impact on their sense of worth and well-being has been a positive unexpected benefit to the project.
- 4.2. One example is given here: 'A lady had requested a special Home Fire Safety visit as she wears a hearing aid and was worried about hearing a smoke alarm at night when her hearing aid is out. The VA for the area organised a visit from Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service special sensory team and they fitted an under pillow unit. She said "This has made such a difference to me. I was worried before but now get good nights sleep'.
- 4.3. And from A Village Agent: 'It has been three years since I retired. I felt I had lost my skills. Recently I reflected on how becoming a Village Agent had reminded me that I had not lost any skills and also how transferable they are. I am really enjoying the experience and also performing the role with someone I had never met before has forged new friendships for me. She said "I love this role; it makes me feel so valued".'
- 4.4. Additionally Village Agents are using an independently validated 'well-being' measurement tool (developed with the new economic foundation) to assess and measure the impact of a Village Agent 'intervention' over time. To date this is showing that contact with a Village Agent has had a positive impact on the well-being of those who have responded.
- 4.5. We are working closely with the Corporate Information Services Manager, Hampshire County Council Chief Executives Department, to collate both information requested (by topic) and any gaps in both provision of services and the ability to offer information on these services.

5. Conclusions

- 5.1. The Village Agent project continues to be a very positive element of the overall approach to Prevention and Early Intervention, maintaining independence for older people who live in rural areas and delaying the need for more intensive and costly care and support services.
- 5.2. High calibre volunteers, often working in geographically based pairs, support each other and offer a consistent, secure service.
- 5.3. Village Agents operate as part of a framework of services which includes the Hampshire County Council Community Independence Team and the Information & Advice service at Age Concern Hampshire.
- 5.4. The Village Agent model is replicable and can be extended to both smaller hamlets and more densely populated urban areas.
- 5.5. The model offers value for money with measurable outcomes.

CORPORATE OR LEGAL INFORMATION:

Links to the Corporate Strategy

Hampshire safer and more secure for all:	yes
Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate):	
Maximising well-being:	yes
Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate):	
Enhancing our quality of place:	yes
Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate):	

Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents	
<p>The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)</p>	
<u>Document</u>	<u>Location</u>
None	

IMPACT ASSESSMENTS:

1. Equalities Impact Assessment:

- 1.1 Village Agents will help alleviate issues of social isolation and exclusion amongst older people, particularly those living in rural communities.
- 1.2 The programme will help address issues around rural deprivation, ensuring older people are aware of how to access services that are available to them.
- 1.3 The Village Agents initiative is inclusive of older BME communities, and other excluded rural communities. The Community Development Officers have been working closely with the team to ensure these communities are engaged with.

2. Impact on Crime and Disorder:

- 2.1 The Village Agents programme is designed to work with both Hampshire Constabulary and the Hampshire Association of Neighbourhood Watch Groups.
- 2.2 One of the key aims of the Village Agents programme is to help reduce isolation amongst older people living in rural environments and to build safer and more cohesive communities. Some of the main areas that Village Agents target include improving home security and the establishment of no cold-calling zones.

3. Climate Change:

- 3.1 One of the key successes of the Village Agents trial to date has been the number of interactions around improving home insulation for older people and energy saving, including *Hitting the Cold Spots*. This will continue to be a key focus for the programme moving forward.