

Briefing Note - Wiltshire Good Neighbours

Department: Community Services

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Wiltshire Good Neighbours

Wiltshire Good Neighbours is an innovative approach to ensuring that those most vulnerable in our rural communities know about and can reach the information, support and services they need to live safe, fulfilling and independent lives. The 23 locally based Good Neighbour Co-ordinators (GNCs) visit clients in their own homes and are able to talk through any issues or concerns they may have and to work with them to ensure that they get the right help at the right time.

Funded primarily by Wiltshire Council, the service is delivered through a partnership of Community First, Age UK Wiltshire and Age UK Salisbury District. The service started in September 2010 and has been rolled out in three phases so that there is now a GNC in 113 of Wiltshire's rural civic parishes. A multi-agency steering group meets quarterly to support the scheme and an operational referencing group meets six monthly and provides a forum for a range of people to ensure good practice is met and effective partnership working is being achieved.

A recent review of the service showed that in the first year of operation Good Neighbours helped over 300 of Wiltshire's older & vulnerable residents to access services and information they needed but did not know about. There was also evidence of extensive raising of awareness in communities about the many ways that people can get the help they need to live independently. The review shows that the scheme has supported many different types of enquiries, including companionship and the figures show that out of the 464 enquires received:

- 22% were about finance & benefits advice
- 19% revolved around living safely at home (i.e. home adaptations, home security etc) and
- 15% were concerning home maintenance (i.e. looking after the house & garden)

Although all of these were the presenting problems – the majority included some issue about rural life or isolation.

Mrs N's Story

A local Good Neighbour Coordinator was contacted by Mrs N who lives alone in a Sarsen Housing bungalow after being widowed a few years ago. Mrs N explained that she had applied for Pension Credit over a year ago and had had her documents returned and been told they would be in touch in six weeks. After hearing nothing she followed this up four times by phone each time to be told it was in progress and someone would contact her. After hearing nothing she gave up trying.

During the home visit with her Good Neighbour Co-ordinator her situation was discussed; she was having difficulty managing on her income and was using her savings to pay for dental treatment. Good Neighbours offered to arrange a Benefits Check and she gave permission for a referral to Age UK in Devizes.

She visited them in the office where they were able to assess her situation and arrange for someone to come and help her with her Pension Credit form. They also advised her that she may be entitled to other benefits and gave her a Housing Benefit/Local Housing Allowance/Council Tax Benefit form. She asked the Good Neighbours to visit again to discuss making an appointment with the Council to have this form processed after she had completed it as far as she was able. Good Neighbours helped her to organise her paperwork so that she had what she needed for her appointment. She later called to thank them for their help and was delighted that she was now receiving Pension Credit (backdated to the beginning of the year) plus Housing and Council Tax Benefit. She said ***"I feel like I can start living again"***

Wiltshire Good Neighbours also has a wider remit in helping to support communities as a whole and identify where there may be gaps in the existing service provision. The following example shows how one Good Neighbour Co-ordinator has done just that:

Mrs T's Story

'Whilst I was delivering leaflets through the village a lady came out of her house and asked me about Wiltshire Good Neighbours. She was an older member of the village and I explained that I had not yet attended any events in the village to talk about the scheme as there hadn't really been a lot of appropriate activities to attend. She expressed a concern that although there were some village activities, none were particularly aimed at the older members. I said that I would be happy to help organise an event if she thought people would support it.

With her support and support from the local Parish Council I arranged an informal coffee morning, aimed at older residents of the village, with speakers from AGE UK Wiltshire attending to talk about their services. This event was a huge success and several members of the local community volunteered to take the coffee morning on as a regular event. This has enabled the older residents of the village to have a regular social event that is of interest to them. After two or three sessions, I was able to step back from the running of the coffee morning to allow the community and new volunteers to take over the running of the group.'

Wiltshire Good Neighbours continues to grow and develop within communities and is already showing its value by being able to respond to local needs, organically and flexibly in a very local way.

For further information, please visit www.wiltsgn.org.uk or contact the service manager Helen Lines on: 01380 732828

