

Wiltshire's Link Scheme Drivers Travel A Million Miles And Save £1m



Community First chief executive Philippa Read

Wiltshire's "good neighbour" Link Scheme drivers have travelled nearly a million miles in the last 12 months, figures published this week show. They have been helping older and dependent people attend hospital appointments, go shopping and meet friends. Since they were set up in the 1990s, Link Schemes have become a lifeline for people living in isolated communities around the county.

But an audit of figures produced by the 45 individual volunteer schemes, carried out by Community First, shows the 1,746 volunteer drivers travelled 992,379 miles, completing 54,434 tasks and working 155,544 hours, saving the taxpayer just under £1million.

Link Schemes are entirely run by volunteers and based in local communities. Some 1,746 Wiltshire volunteers donated their time and efforts to more than 1,000 people each week in 2013.

Community First's audit showed the most frequent requests in 2013 were to get to medical appointments, shopping, reading to people and transport to lunch clubs and social events. But other volunteers also visit people just for a chat or to help with small household tasks. Philippa Read, Community First's chief executive, said: "We are in a time of unprecedented social and economic change with reductions in public spending and changes to health and care.

"People in rural areas are ageing faster than their urban counterparts and there is going to be a 21 per cent increase in their numbers living in Wiltshire by 2026 – these people will also live longer. "That makes the work of these volunteers all the more remarkable and all the more important."

Wiltshire Times Wednesday 7 May 2014 in News by Lewis Cowen