Review of Scheme of Community Support for Older People

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY, RURAL AND GAELTACHT AFFAIRS

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Final Version

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Acknowledgements

Executive Summary

This review of the Scheme of Community Support for Older People was undertaken to address concerns raised that it was no longer achieving its stated objectives of addressing the genuine needs of vulnerable older people or fostering a genuine community support for older people on a nationwide basis. Demand for the Scheme has also increased against a background of deteriorating public finances and the need to improve its operations and effectiveness.

The Scheme was established in 1996 and has its origins in responding to conclusions of a Task Force on Security for the Elderly to consider the security needs of older people. The purpose of the Scheme is to encourage and assist the community's support for older people by means of community based grants to improve the security of older people.

The Scheme operates with locally based voluntary and community organisations, an essential element in its delivery. Applicant organisations must be community or voluntary in nature, and work with or provide community services and support for older people.

Applications can be made to the Department by participating groups during the year in respect of a range of equipment to support independent living and improved security in the home. The majority of applications relate to personal monitored alert systems. In the main, these systems are linked to monitoring stations providing a 24-hour service.

The eligibility of beneficiaries is assessed and verified by the applicant group. To be eligible, a person must be aged 65 or over, be living alone or in a household comprising exclusively of other older persons and be considered vulnerable. The latter is defined as being a person of advanced age, having a disability, living in social or physical isolation or a victim of crime. It also includes those being discharged from hospital or in need of continuing medical care.

From 2002 to 2006, average annual expenditure on the Scheme was approximately €2.4m. In 2007, when the Scheme moved to an open call, expenditure rose to €3.7m and it increased further in 2008 when expenditure reached €4.3m.

The terms of reference for this review were agreed with a number of stakeholders and sought to examine and make recommendations on a range of issues including the extent to which the objectives of the Scheme were being achieved, targeting of resources, administrative simplification, the range and nature of equipment funded, the extent to which equipment is reused, alignment with other public supports and monitoring costs.

Consultations were undertaken with a broad range of stakeholders. In respect to matters in the terms of reference, responses varied depending on the type of community group involved. With respect to the Scheme's objective, the results of the feedback both written and in the telephone survey were broadly consistent. They suggest some differences in emphasis between the types of organisation consulted. The outcome suggests some general ambiguity and weaknesses with the community support objective of the Scheme.

With respect to targeting, there was acceptance of a need for greater targeting but concern that community groups did not possess the necessary expertise to identify those most in need. An

examination of applications suggested that 88% of people supported were aged 70 years or over indicating a high degree of achievement in terms of targeting.

The intensity of continuing community engagement with the older person once the systems were installed varied greatly. Many responses identified a need for the administrative processes to be simplified to remove repetitive and unnecessary processes. Comments also reflected a view that too many groups were covering the same area and that some areas were poorly covered.

The majority of responses confirmed that the equipment had an acceptable life span and that the quality of service delivered, in terms of both the installation of the equipment and the monitoring service provided, was of a high standard with few negative comments offered by beneficiaries. With respect to monitoring services, most respondents were content with the service provided and the associated costs. However, a number of comments were received in respect of the need to provide support towards monitoring costs.

A high degree of engagement with other community groups was identified but weaker engagement was noted with other agencies such as the Gardaí and the HSE except for some groups making larger numbers of applications.

The Scheme contributes to achieving national policy objectives in ensuring that older people continue to live independently in their homes. Though some ambiguity was noted in the understanding of the Scheme's objectives, the stated objectives remain valid but require restatement and reinforcement to broaden understanding and application at local level, particularly in respect of the need for ongoing engagement with the older person once equipment has been installed.

The number of beneficiaries that identify public health nurses as the initial source of contact in such groups is noteworthy, indicating that older people with health needs are major beneficiaries. However, this factor may have implications for governance and future control of equipment supplied.

Community activity, as an initial source of beneficiaries, appears to be stronger in groups handling smaller numbers of applications. This activity is in keeping with the spirit and structure of the Scheme as initially conceived. Only a small number of beneficiaries identified the Gardaí as the source of contact with the Scheme.

The review has identified issues with the level of coverage, both urban and rural, which indicates a need to improve the range of information available and to identify suitable community organisations that can administer the scheme more widely.

The administration processes underpinning the Scheme was generally found to be in need of simplification and updating. Additional issues identified were the need for better information and guidance to groups in assessing eligibility and in meeting the conditions of the Scheme. Improved procurement procedures were also suggested to gain greater value for money in the supply of equipment.

Suggestions with respect to the range of equipment supported under the Scheme confirmed a continuing need to focus on monitored personal alert systems and monitored smoke and carbon

monoxide detectors. Lower priority was attached to the need to support home security items such as locks with preference for the inclusion of a broader range of equipment such as door viewers and interior emergency lighting.

Some confusion was evident from a cross section of community groups regarding the ownership of the equipment although good practice was widely evident. Concerns about reuse policies have been identified where groups have made infrequent applications or large numbers of applications.

In excess of 75,000 monitoring contracts are currently active with annual fees varying between €51 and €90 depending on the nature of the service provided. The review noted high levels of satisfaction with the service provided but little understanding of the variety of services offered.

The Recommendations made by the Review Team are set out in Chapter 7.

Chapter 1 Introduction

In this document, older people or an older person, describes a person aged 65 years and older. Community and voluntary organisations are referred to as community groups or groups.

1. Origins and Background

The Scheme of Community Support for Older People has its origins in the conclusion of a Task Force on Security for the Elderly to consider the security needs of older people not benefiting from income tax relief in respect of home intruder alarms announced in Budget 1996 (Section 5 of the Finance Act 1996). These initiatives followed a number of attacks on older people. The conclusions centred on

- The need to put in place a mechanism to provide support to people not able to access the tax relief for the installation of home alarms to address individual needs

- The provision of grant support to community and voluntary organisations to enable local involvement in the provision and installation of security equipment and alarm monitoring devices on the basis that this ensured the best opportunity for meeting individual needs.

Other recommendations of the Task Force concerned the provision of information on home security, greater community involvement to support older people and better financial assistance towards the cost of equipment.

The Scheme was established in 1996 and administered by the then Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs. Subsequently, the Scheme was transferred to the newly-formed Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs in June 2002. The purpose of the Scheme has remained essentially the same since 1996, that is, to encourage and assist the community's support for older people by means of community based grants to improve the security of older people. The underlying rationale for involving local voluntary and community organisations in the delivery of the Scheme is to build on and consolidate the ongoing contact by those groups with older people and to highlight awareness of their home safety needs.

2. Overview of the Operation of the Scheme

Applicant Organisations

Applications to the Scheme are made by community or voluntary organisations on a self-selection basis that satisfy three broad criteria. Organisations must register on each occasion they apply to the Scheme. Applicant organisations must be community or voluntary in nature, that is, they must operate on a not for profit basis, for the purposes of working with or providing support for older people and providing community services and support. Secondly, each organisation must be satisfied that it has the capacity to meet the conditions associated with the administration and operation of the Scheme. These are set out in the eligibility guidelines for the Scheme. In addition, the organisation should be well established in their local area and must be able to demonstrate a track record of voluntary and community activity. Reflecting the focus of the Scheme, there is no requirement for the applicant organisation to have a particular legal structure

other that it is properly constituted or affiliated to a national organisation and recognised locally for the services it provides.

Before an applicant organisation can receive funds it must provide a current tax clearance certificate (for grants over €10,000) or have been granted charitable tax status by the Revenue Commissioners and accordingly provide a valid Charity (CHY) Reference Number. Organisations must also operate a bank account in their own name and be in a position to prepare and supply financial statements.

Application Process

A fully completed application form setting out details of the applicant organisation and including a separate form in respect of each individual on behalf of which a grant is sought must be submitted. Between 1996 and 2006 the Scheme operated on a single annual call for applications. Since 2007, applications are accepted at any stage during the year subject to the annual aggregate grant not exceeding €30,000 per organisation. In addition to providing a profile of the organisations structure and activities, the requirements attaching to each person on behalf of which a grant is sought include (i) the name, address, age and signature of the individual beneficiary, (ii) a declaration that the beneficiary has been visited and had their suitability assessed (iii) two quotations from proposed suppliers of the equipment, (iv) where relevant, tax clearance certificate or charity number, (v) where appropriate, copies of declarations in respect of previous grants received and the most recent financial statements of the applicant organisation. Applications are processed by the Department and the outcome notified to the organisations between four and eight weeks from the date of receipt of the necessary documentation. The level of payment is calculated on the basis of the equipment for which grant support is applied based on the cheapest quotation submitted by the applicant. The maximum individual grant level is €750 (€950 for older people living on islands) if all items of equipment are required, however, in practice few applications of this nature are received.

Eligibility of the beneficiary

There is no universal or automatic entitlement to grant support from the Scheme. Beneficiaries are required to reside within the applicant organisation's geographical area of operation. This is generally considered to be the general environs of small towns and villages, parish, housing estates or defined neighbourhood areas in larger urban centres, and broader areas in the case of larger organisations but not generally extending beyond county boundaries. Where there is no organisation operating the Scheme in a particular area, a beneficiary is advised to contact the Department for the location of the nearest eligible applicant organisations. In general, an organisation receiving an enquiry from outside its area of operations is required to refer the enquiry to the relevant organisation operating in their area.

Representatives of the applicant organisations are required to visit and discuss the merits of the Scheme with the beneficiary and satisfy itself as to the eligibility of each applicant. The eligibility of that beneficiary is assessed and verified by reference to three essential criteria:

- Aged 65 or over on the date of application;

- Living alone or in a household comprising exclusively of other older persons; and

- Vulnerable, defined as being a person of advanced age, having a disability, living in social or physical isolation or a victim of crime.

Vulnerability has been defined to include older people being discharged from hospital or medical care.

Installation

The selection of equipment supplier is a matter for the community or voluntary organisation but they are required to deal only with reputable suppliers. Once notified of the outcome of an application, the organisation receiving the grants is free to select the supplier which represents the best value for money consistent with the Scheme guidelines. Installation of the socially monitored alarm equipment is generally undertaken within a matter of days. Separate installation by local trades-people or volunteers is required for items of equipment such as door and window locks and lighting.

Grants levels

The level of grant available to both applicant organisations and individual beneficiaries has been revised on a number of occasions since the introduction of the Scheme. The maximum level of grant support that can be claimed by an organisation is €30,000 per annum but item specific limits are applied to individual categories of equipment.

Table 1.1			
Maximum Grants per Individual for Items Grant Supported			
Item	**2004**	**2005**	**2006-09**
Socially monitored alarms.	€300	€300	€300
Exterior security lighting.	€120	€150	€200
Interior emergency lighting (Offshore islands only)	--	€150	€150
Household security equipment (locks)	€150	€150	€200
Smoke/carbon monoxide alarms	€50	€50	€50

Monitoring and Charges

The Scheme does not provide funding to offset the cost of monitoring services. Monitoring services are mainly provided by private sector suppliers generally linked to the original equipment supplier. The annual monitoring charge is the responsibility of the older person. Both the service content and annual charge levels vary with the provider.

Ownership of Equipment

Grant aid is provided towards the cost of outright purchase of the equipment. Except for household security items, all other equipment remains the property of the relevant community and voluntary organisation to which grant support was made. When the individual beneficiary no longer has need of the equipment ownership reverts to the community or voluntary organisation that was awarded the grant. The equipment can be reused at the organisation's discretion. In practice, only the monitored alarm base unit is reallocated to another eligible beneficiary. However, the equipment can be reinstalled to meet the needs of persons who would not usually be eligible under the Scheme, such as a person suffering a disability or with chronic medical conditions under the age of 65.

Replacement of Equipment

The Scheme provides grant support for replacement equipment to be installed where previous equipment becomes defective or damaged because of age or usage. In general, equipment suppliers will provide replacement equipment at no additional cost, however, circumstances may arise where this is not possible and replacement equipment is not available from within the stock owned by the community group. In such circumstances, a grant for replacement equipment may be provided. Funding is not provided for the replacement of functioning equipment simply because of age or claims of obsolescence or incompatibility by the monitoring service. The most usual occurrence where additional grant support is needed is where new accessories, such as a personal pendant, are required when the equipment is being reinstalled for reasons of wear and tear or to ensure hygiene.

Chapter 2   Review Process

1.   Rationale

The Scheme was suspended in April 2009 to afford the Department an opportunity to review its operation amid concerns around the implementation of key elements of the Scheme, targeting of resources, and escalating costs against a background of deteriorating public finances.

The changes introduced since 2004, and particularly in 2007, while allowing more flexibility and improved access to the Scheme, precipitated a considerable increase in demand for funding under the Scheme. From 2002 to 2006, average annual expenditure on the Scheme was approximately €2.4m. In 2007, when the Scheme moved to an open call, expenditure rose to €3.7m and it increased further in 2008 when expenditure reached €4.3m.

Table 2.1			
Year	Value of Grant Paid	Number of Groups	Beneficiaries[1]
2004	€2,162,330	355	6,424
2005	€2,287,798	445	6,796
2006	€2,038,074	399	6,957
2007	€3,708,019	464	10,764
2008	€4,312,014	522	11,762
2009[1]	€2,096,030	424	6,390
	€22,831,678		

[1]   The number of beneficiaries includes estimates for 2004 and 2005
[2]   The Scheme was suspended for six months in 2009 pending completion of this review
Source: Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs

The cost of the Scheme in 2007 and 2008 increased significantly on previous years and the estimated cost for 2009, based on the value of applications received in the first quarter of 2009, could have exceeded €5m against an estimated allocation of over €3m. It would appear that this increase in demand can be attributed to two main factors, namely, an increase in the number of groups, and therefore beneficiaries, applying for support and a rise in the number of groups claiming the maximum level of grants permitted. The latter factors raising concern that the source of this increased demand may relate to the actions of intermediaries.

In addition to unprecedented demand and escalating costs, concerns had also been raised that the Scheme was no longer achieving its stated objectives of addressing the genuine needs of vulnerable older people or fostering a genuine community support for older people on a nationwide basis. Concerns that the Scheme no longer prioritised support for vulnerable older people living alone were prevalent. It appeared that the Scheme funding was also perceived as being available to any person over the age of 65 years and that support was being given regardless of their financial means to meet their own needs.

The extent to which the Scheme had achieved better community support for older people was questioned, with fears that community support and contact with older persons supported

frequently ended once the equipment had been installed. This raised related concerns that equipment previously supplied was no longer in use and was not being reused to meet new demands as envisaged by the Scheme.

2.   Terms of Reference

The terms of reference of the review were drafted in consultation with a number of national bodies representing the needs of older people, including the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Age Action Ireland, Muintir na Tíre, the Irish Senior Citizen's Parliament and Irish Rural Link.

It was agreed that the review would examine and make recommendations on the following:

- The extent to which the objectives of the Scheme were being achieved;

- Options for improved targeting of resources;

- Options for simplifying the administration and implementation of the Scheme;

- The range and nature of equipment funded under the Scheme, with particular focus on new /alternative technologies; cost of equipment and value for money; and the suitability and quality of equipment;

- Options for the better alignment with broader supports available from other public sources;

- The extent to which recycling of equipment occurs and can be encouraged; and

- The variation in monitoring costs underpinning the products provided under the Scheme.

3.   Methodology

The findings and recommendations arising from the review were based on detailed consultations with the key stakeholders, including:

- Community and voluntary organisations engaged in the operation of the Scheme since 2005;

- National representative organisations e.g. the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Age Action Ireland, Muintir na Tíre, the Irish Senior Citizen's Parliament and Irish Rural Link;

- An Garda Síochána;

- The Fire Services; and

- Other Government Departments and public bodies providing supports for older people.

Stakeholder consultation was conducted as follows:

- Written submissions were invited from some 840 community and voluntary organisations funded previously under the Scheme, requesting observations under broad headings drawn from the review terms of reference; in excess of 120 written submissions were received;

- The Department conducted almost 100 in depth telephone interviews with representatives of community and voluntary organisations participating in the Scheme in 2008. This sample was selected on the basis of size of grant awarded in 2008, geographical location (including an urban and rural spread), and organisational type and national affiliation.

- Discussions were held with the Community Liaison Gardaí for Mayo, Sligo and Galway and An Garda Síochána Community Relations Division;

- Discussions were held with the Fire Prevention Officers for Mayo, Sligo and Galway;

- Discussions were held with officials from the Departments of Environment, Heritage and Local Government; Health and Children; and Justice, Equality and Law Reform; and

- The Private Security Authority, the Health Services Executive and the National Standards Institute of Ireland was consulted on aspects of the review.

The review team also consulted with representatives of equipment and monitoring service providers, with a view to assessing the range and nature of the equipment and monitoring services available. The review team conducted a number of on-site visits with equipment and monitoring service providers. Other equipment suppliers and monitoring service providers were invited to make submissions and presentations. Written submissions from industry stakeholders were also accepted and considered in the review process.

The conclusions and recommendations were also informed by:

- A quantitative analysis of data captured by the Department as part of the CSOP application and administration process for the period 2004 to date; and

- Desk-based research, encompassing the findings of previous reviews of the Scheme, external evaluations of the Scheme and other available research on tele-security, tele-care and the needs of the elderly

4.   Previous Reviews

1999 Review

An evaluation of the operation of the Scheme was undertaken by the then Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs. The evaluation examined all aspects of the Scheme and undertook a comprehensive consultation with older people who had benefited from the Scheme, community organisations involved in its administration, key informants and discussions with providers of equipment and monitoring services. This evaluation concluded that while the Scheme was welcomed and had recognisable achievements, issues of improved targeting, clearer criteria and

better guidance were identified. It noted that the administration and management of the Scheme allowed for flexibility, responsibility and autonomy for community groups to react to locally identified needs. Weaknesses identified included lack of nationwide coverage due to failure of community groups to take up the funding options available and limited awareness of the Scheme. The evaluation also referred to the lack of monitoring and ongoing evaluation, the recording of best practice and sharing of learning.

The evaluation also highlighted a range of issues with the operation of the Scheme particularly in the areas of publicity, lack of information and advice on crime prevention, poor data relating to crime against older people, and engagement by participating community groups with other agencies. Considerable benefits were noted in the level of community engagement, health and improved awareness of security issues by older people. One of the benefits noted was that local groups were given greater local visibility and functions, though this was tempered with concerns around poor coverage due to the absence of active groups and the perception that the middle-class areas of Dublin were better able to access the Scheme due to the better capacity of their membership. Significant demand was evident to extend the criteria to include people under 65 with disabilities. The administrative and operational changes that resulted from this evaluation were implemented incrementally over the following years with improved guidance and information being provided to community groups. The Scheme was transferred from the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs to the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs in June 2002.

2004 Review

Prior to 2006, the Scheme operated by way of an annual call for applications. In advance of each annual call, the relevant Department examined elements of the Scheme's operation and administration. As a result, a number of innovations were introduced. Initially, the scheme covered 50% to 90% of the costs of work carried out and groups could apply for maximum funding of €300,000 per annum. In practice, most of the grant support was provided at 90% of the costs incurred. Following a review in 2004, partial grants were replaced in favour of a fixed grant of up to €300 per individual towards the cost for the installation for a monitored alarm system. The maximum annual grant of €300,000 per community group per annum was reduced to €30,000 per annum to reflect the level of grants applied for in previous years and to reinforce the local community focus at the core of the Scheme. It was intended that the Scheme would better achieve its objective by redirecting resources towards smaller groups which are more likely to have direct personal links and ongoing contact with older people in their immediate area and who were therefore better placed to understand and appreciate their needs. Grants in respect of the supply of smoke detectors were also introduced for the first time.

Comhairle – Social Policy Report 2005

Comhairle issued a Social Policy report in November 2005 to highlight issues relating to the Scheme. The report was based primarily on feedback from the network of Citizen Information Centres and on the needs and experience of people using their services. This report relied heavily on the 1999 evaluation and noted that the transfer of the Scheme to the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs resulted in a better overview of the scheme's operation

with, however, some concern that the more hands-on approach possible in the regional office network of the previous Department was lost. The report noted that the dependence on local community groups to administer the Scheme had resulted in variations in the take-up and operation and that, despite criteria to target resources, funding had become universal and covered all persons with a genuine need. The Comhairle report also noted that many local groups had weak administrative capacity and that these presented challenges for the future success of the Scheme. Further concerns were raised in respect of the absence of support for the cost of monitoring and the failure of the Scheme to support the installation of conventional house alarms and the provision of interior emergency lighting.

Citizen Information Centres raised additional issues concerning the once-off annual availability of the Scheme, administrative burdens, problems identified by some groups with obtaining the services from local tradespersons, lack of funds to repair equipment and poor usage of equipment by the older person once installed due to lack of instruction and information of its use. Comhairle set out to address the issues identified by firstly establishing a range of general principles to apply to the provision of alarm, communication equipment and security systems of older people. In summary these were:

- Such systems were a key component in ensuring the security needs of older people and ensuring independent living should be a factor in allocating resources and the methods of delivery;

- Such systems should not replace person-to-person contact;

- Verification that the older person actually needs the systems in deference to needs identified by a family member or relative;

- Detailed instruction and guidance on how to use the systems;

- Training for members of community groups on determining the needs of older people;

- Follow-up with the older person once the systems are installed;

- Regular service of the systems.

Comhairle recommended the extension of the Scheme to persons with disabilities to encourage independent living; the provision of contingency funds to enable equipment to be obtained year round; better information and joint working between the Department and community groups; greater interagency co-operation; and a reassessment of the administration of the Scheme to establish if the objectives of community support were being achieved. Further recommendations were made in relation to national coverage and a broader assessment of the domestic needs of older people beyond security

2006 Review

During 2005, the Department conducted a series of consultations with community groups and examined a range of issues identified internally in advance of advertising the Scheme that year.

This review also drew on the Social Policy Report prepared by Comhairle and on submissions received from participating community groups and issues raised in Dáil Éireann. Of particular concern, was the level of fatigue evident in some community groups with fewer groups indicating a willingness to administer the Scheme due, mainly, to the short application period, delays caused by the Department in having to process large numbers of applications and administrative burdens on community organisations. The review concluded that fundamentally the Scheme was serving its objectives but that some changes needed to be introduced to enable better delivery locally. One key innovation was the introduction of an administration subvention to participating groups. The amount of this subvention was based on 3% of the group's previous year's grant, with a minimum amount of €100 and maximum €600 being paid. This subvention recognised the role of the community groups in delivering the benefits of the Scheme to their local communities and enabled some of the costs incurred by the applicant organisations to be defrayed.

In response to feedback from groups, the Department introduced a grant of €150 for interior emergency lighting for qualifying older people living on our offshore islands, increased the maximum individual grant in respect of household security equipment to €200 and increased the maximum individual grant in respect of security lighting to €200 with revised maximum levels of grants set for other items of home security. Further innovations provided funding for carbon monoxide detectors when supplied with smoke detection devices. Other changes introduced in 2006 included regular advertising and acceptance, from 2007, of applications on a year-round basis.

Chapter 3 – Profile of Older People

1.   Demographic profile of older people

Census data available from the Central Statistics Office (CSO) shows that older people constitute about 11% of the population, which is low by EU and international standards.   Population projections prepared by the CSO indicate that by 2050 older people will represent nearly 30% of the population.   Older people are not just living longer but staying healthy for longer.   These factors will have a major impact on services needed to sustain independent living at home over the coming decades. Research commissioned by the Health Promotion Unit of the Department of Health & Children and carried out at the Centre for Health Promotion Studies at NUI Galway and at the Department of Public Health Medicine and Epidemiology, University College Dublin (now UCD School of Public Health and Population Science) in 2002 provided data in respect of the general health and lifestyle of the population. This research indicated that roughly nine out of ten older people are considered to be in fair to good health. In the same survey, at least half are reported as having a chronic illness or disability, compared with one-fifth of the working age population.

Table 3.1 Share of National Population by Age				
Age Group	Males	Females	Total Persons	Share
0-14	443,044	421,405	864,449	20%
15-24	321,007	311,725	632,732	15%
25-44	681,988	663,885	1,345,873	33%
45-64	468,037	460,831	928,868	23%
65 years & over	207,095	260,831	467,926	11%
Totals	2,121,171	2,118,677	4,239,848	

Source: CSO Census 2006

In relation to income, social welfare pensions have been substantially increased in real terms, especially in recent years. The achievement of the target of €200 per week for the lowest social welfare pension fulfilled a commitment set out by the Government in 2002 in its Agreed Programme for Government.   The effects of lower incomes are also offset by reduced living expenses as a result of a range of non-cash benefits for older people including medical cards, electricity and telephone allowances, free TV licence, free travel and grants for minor house repairs. The majority of older people also benefit from owning their own homes.

The 2006 Census reported that there were 467,926 people in Ireland aged 65 years and older representing just over 11% of the population of the State. Of these 207,095 are males and 260,831 females. Just over 24% of older people were aged 80 years and over. Two thirds of older people were living in private households with other persons and this decreased from nearly 80% of those aged 65-69 years to 40% for those aged 85 and over. Nearly a quarter of those aged 85 and over is living in communal establishments. This was over twice the rate for the 80-84 age groups. Of the 422,242 people aged 65 years and older in the State living in private households, nearly 29% were women living alone. Table 3.2 provides a breakdown by age of over 65s according to the 2006 census.

Table 3.2				
Share of Population over 65 by Age Group and Living Alone				
Age Group	Persons	%	Cumulative	Living Alone
65 – 69	143,396	30.7%		19.4
70 – 74	119,152	25.5%	262,548	25.1
75 – 79	92,466	19.8%	355,014	31.7
80 – 84	64,884	13.9%	419,898	35.4
85 years & over	48,028	10.3%	467,926	31.7
Source: CSO Census 2006				

2. Poverty Levels

According to the National Action Plan on Social Inclusion, older people have among the lowest levels of consistent poverty at 3.7% in 2005. There has been a significant reduction in the numbers *at risk of poverty* from 27.1% in 2004 to 20.1% in 2005 (below 60% of median income), and just 6.8% below the 50% threshold. State pensions and other social transfers are particularly important for this group since they account for some 60% of their income and reduce their risk of poverty. With respect to older people living in rural areas, analysis prepared by the Review Team shows that a significantly greater number of older people living in rural areas rely on a non-contributory State Pension as their source of income. This is particularly noticeable in counties Cavan, Leitrim, Donegal, Longford, Mayo and Monaghan but somewhat less so in counties Roscommon, Galway, Clare and Kerry. Of 1,166 electoral divisions included in the CLÁR Programme, some 448 showed a continuing decline in population between the 2002 and 2006 Censuses with counties Mayo, Kerry and North West Cork being particularly affected. Taken together, these are also the counties where isolation from transport and local services for older people is likely to be most prevalent. Table 3.3 gives an breakdown of the number of older people in receipt of pensions.

Table 3.3					
Number of Recipients by Type of State Pension, 2007 & 2008					
Year	Contributory	Transition	Non-Contributory	Pre-Retirement Allowance	Total
2007	237,599	5,851	97,726	10,624	351,800
2008	250,117	7,242	97,784	8,872	364,015
Source: Department of Social and Family Affairs					

3. Security Fears and Crime

Fears

Research commissioned by the National Crime Council and published by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform in April 2009 indicates that, while fear of crime can significantly reduce the quality of life of some individuals, the majority of individuals either do not worry about becoming a victim of crime or their fear of crime has a low impact on their quality of life.

The research suggests three underlying processes that may influence the level of fear individuals experience and the impact of this fear on their quality of life. These include an individual's prior history of victimisation, feelings of personal vulnerability and incidence of burglaries in the area in which the older person resides, with individuals living in an area with a higher crime rate for burglary seemingly less likely to fear crime and to state that this fear reduced their quality of life.

Older adults, females, widowed individuals, lower socio-economic status groups and retired individuals were more likely to fear crime and for this fear to affect their quality of life. According to the research, older adults were found to report a higher fear of crime than younger age groups despite a lower risk of victimisation and not surprisingly, factors such as geographical location and socio-economic status were linked to fear of crime

People over 65 are more likely than younger people to perceive crime as a very serious problem as indicated in Table 3.4.

Table 3.4
Perceptions of Crime in Ireland 2006 (%)

Age Group	Very serious problem	Serious problem	Fairly serious problem	Not a serious problem	Not a problem	Total %
State	45.9	34.9	16.2	2.7	0.3	100.0
18-24	30.7	37.8	25.0	5.9	0.7	100.0
25-44	40.5	37.1	18.5	3.5	0.3	100.0
46-64	52.3	33.8	12.6	1.2	0.1	100.0
65+	63.0	28.3	8.0	0.5	0.1	100.0

Source: CSO, Crime and Victimisation 2006

Crime

The levels of crime against older people remain low in Ireland in comparison with other countries. Crime against older people has increased in recent years and tends to occur in cycles, with some years much worse than others. Crimes against property are more frequent than crimes against the person. As shown in Table 3.4, less than 2% of older people are victims of any crime. This is a lower rate than the state average and those in other age groups.

Table 3.5
Type of Crimes by Age Group 2006

Age Group	Theft with violence		Theft without violence		Physical Assault		Total victims of any crime		Total '000[1,2]
	'000	%	'000	%	'000	%	'000	%	
State	38.7	1.2	82.5	2.5	37.1	1.1	150.7	4.6	3,243.8
18-24	10.7	2.3	21.1	4.6	11.6	2.5	41.2	8.9	463.6
25-44	16.9	1.2	37.6	2.8	18.4	1.4	69.0	5.1	1362.2
45-64	8.3	0.9	18.4	2.0	6.5	0.7	32.1	3.4	941.1
65+	2.8	0.6	5.3	1.1	0.6	0.1	8.3	1.7	476.8

Any crime refers to victims of theft with or without violence or physical assault.
A person could be the victim of more than one crime hence the figure will not necessarily equal the sum of all crimes.

People over 65 are less likely to be victims of an assault incurring injury than people in other age groups and less likely to be involved in assaults involving use or threat of a weapon. Older people are also the more likely to report assaults to the Gardaí and more likely to be involved in assaults incurring injury than other age groups. Older people are less likely to be victims of theft with violence than people in other age groups. As indicated in Table 3.5, the rate of crime against persons aged over 65 is lower than in other age groups.

Table 3.6 Types of Assaults by Age Group 2006					
Age Group	Total Persons Assaulted	Assaults occurring once	Involving use or threat of weapon	Assaults incurring injury	Assaults reported to Gardaí
	'000	%	%	%	%
State	37.1	75.1	30.2	42.0	52.6
18-24	11.6	82.8	38.8	48.3	42.2
25-44	18.4	65.2	23.4	40.8	54.9
45-64	6.5	60.0	35.4	35.4	61.5
65+	0.6	83.3	16.7	66.7	83.3
Source: CSO, Crime and Victimisation 2006					

As shown in Table 3.6, older people are less likely to be victims of assaults than people in other age groups. They were also more likely than any other age group to suffer the crime on one occasion. It is more likely that older people report crimes to the Gardaí.

4. Older People and Accidents

Age-related disabilities like impaired vision, hearing and mobility, osteoporosis, arthritis, rheumatism and reduced resistance to poisons and food-borne infections make older people more prone to accidents and make their recovery slower or more limited than younger people. People aged over 80 are more likely to have problems with mobility and everyday activities such as bathing, dressing, moving about and eating. The main types of accidents involving older people include accidents in the home such as falls, fire and burns with the most severely affected requiring hospital admission. Older people are more likely to live in older accommodation which may be more conducive to accidents and fire or be unsuitable for those affected by disability. In 2008, nearly half of all deaths due to accidents (90) were recorded as falls. Older people are at particular risk from injury or death from domestic fires with a third of deaths in recent years from fire being older people (Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government).

5. Government Policy

Government policy in relation to older people is to support people to live in dignity and independence in their own homes and communities for as long as possible and, where this is not possible, to support access to quality long-term residential care. This policy approach is renewed and developed in the latest partnership agreement, *Towards 2016*. The Programme for

Government includes a commitment to a National Positive Ageing Strategy to be developed by the Office of the Minister for Older People. This will include:

- The development of operational plans by Government Departments clearly setting out objectives relating to older people;

- Joined up thinking on initiatives serving older people;

- Ongoing mechanisms to monitor progress and identify challenges;

- Liaising with recognised voluntary groups in the area; and

- Giving consideration to the appointment of an Ombudsman for Older People.

The Government and social partners in *Towards 2016* undertook to work together over ten years towards achieving a number of goals for older people in Ireland in the context of increased life expectancy and greater possibilities and expectations for quality of life:

- Every older person would be encouraged and supported to participate to the greatest extent possible in social and civic life;

- Every older person would have access to an income which is sufficient to sustain an acceptable standard of living;

- Every older person would have adequate support to enable them to remain living independently in their own homes for as long as possible.

These commitments are expected to result in greater access to good quality services in the community, including health, education, transport, housing and security, and should provide older persons with greater opportunities for civic and social engagement at community level.

National policy for older people has been focused on health and social care issues. The Positive Ageing Strategy will be broader in character and cover such issues as older people's participation in society, the ways in which public programmes and services for older people are organised and utilised; and the determinants of quality of life for older people such as income, health and social care, housing, transport, education and employment, or any other issue of relevance to older people.

Care requirements are expected to grow as people become more dependent with age. Service provision is a key objective of policy to enable older people stay in their homes and communities for as long as possible. Social isolation, in particular, has been identified as a particular risk for older people and policy development in recent years has sought to address this. The development of services for older people is evident across all Government Departments and agencies. Community based initiatives such as the Rural Social Scheme, Community Services Programme, Rural Transport Programme and Community Employment, in addition to specific measures funded by the Dormant Accounts Fund, have done much in recent years to supplement and complement State provided support by enabling local voluntary responses to be developed to meet the needs

of older people to remain active and to have their needs met either in their homes or within their communities.

Chapter 4   Policy and Objectives

1.   Policy Context

A summary of the national policy approach is set out in Chapter 3. The circumstances facing older people have changed since the Scheme was first introduced. Income and prosperity levels have improved and the quality and range of care services have developed enormously since the late 1990's. While older people's awareness of their security and health needs have improved, their continuing connection to the social life has diminished through changes in traditions and lifestyle and greater concerns about personal safety. General policy initiatives across a range of sectors have helped to improve the engagement of older people in their communities and to deliver age friendly responses and support. The National Action Plan for Social Inclusion indicates that two-thirds of older people meet friends and relatives most days, with most of the rest doing so once or twice a week. Importantly, older people living alone had similar levels of contact with other people. However, older rural women had less contact with others than older rural men. Older people are also less likely than others of having engagement in sports or social clubs or organisations. This is particularly so in rural areas.

2.   Objectives of the Scheme

The Scheme contributes to achieving national policy objectives, though ambiguity is evident. While the stated objectives have remained unchanged to any significant degree since the Scheme was first introduced, how these are understood by the stakeholders vary considerably. The stated objectives are to encourage and assist the community's support for older people by means of a grant scheme to improve security. The understanding of what this means in practice varied widely between participating community groups, the agencies consulted and other stakeholders. In the consultation process the overwhelming majority of respondents were content that the objectives were being met, even where differences of emphasis and understanding were evident.

For neighbourhood based community groups, such as Community Alert and Neighbourhood Watch groups, the priority was generally found to be consistent in securing the security needs of the older person. Social services and senior citizen groups in general see the scheme as an "add on" to the range of community supports that they are able to provide. Conferences of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul operate the scheme to satisfy social need identified through their work of visiting the poor and isolated, while groups providing care to older people, such as carers groups, see it as assistance in the health area. Groups making large numbers of applications annually also appeared to have strong linkages with public health officials with the majority of beneficiaries appearing to have been identified initially by public health nurses, occupational therapists and social workers.

Groups generally placed little importance on the objective of the Scheme in supporting community support for the older person. Greater emphasis appears to be placed on the need to ensure independent living, meeting immediate security concerns and ensuring the privacy of the individual was protected. With respect to the latter, a significant number of groups indicate the need to respect the privacy of the individual as the rationale for not maintaining ongoing contact.

This would appear contrary to the objective of the Scheme and the operational mandate of the groups.

3. Continuing engagement with the older person

A central element of the Scheme is to promote the engagement of the older person with the community through the activities of the group locally. Given the nature of the Scheme, the activity is, in the main, related to befriending and ensuring ongoing contact to provide the older person with peace of mind with respect to their security needs. Access to the Scheme is confined to community organisations that can display a commitment to ongoing engagement with older people and have a track record of community service. The review sought to establish the strength of community engagement with the older person.

The intensity of continuing community engagement with the older person once the systems were installed varied greatly and appeared to depend on the nature and ethos of the group involved. The level of engagement cannot be linked to any particular category of group, however, community groups working at parish or neighbourhood level appeared to have more frequent engagement whereas the position of larger groups was that engagement was more formal, infrequent and event based. In general, the response from Community Alert and local level groups confirmed a high level of ongoing engagement once the equipment was installed; however, evidence of this activity was not consistent across groups surveyed. Follow-on activity tended to relate to ensuring use of the installed equipment and calls to reassure the older person. Senior citizen groups, Conferences of the Society of St Vincent de Paul and care providers indicated higher levels of ongoing contact. It would appear from the respondent's contributions that ongoing contact was weaker for groups making large numbers of applications over broad geographic areas and where the operation of intermediaries was evident.

A general response was the continuing engagement was achieved by monitoring service providers with many groups mentioning the need to protect the privacy of the older person. There was widespread evidence of good practice in relation to on-going engagement, with many groups having informal arrangements in place for regular contact with the older person with visits structured around the use of the alarm system, surveys of ongoing security needs and general befriending activity.

Sources of applications

This position is confirmed by an analysis of the initial source of identification of the beneficiary with the Scheme. Since 2006, a question was included in the beneficiary form to indicate the initial source of contact for older people with the Scheme. A detailed examination of a sample of 2,026 applications received in 2009 from 110 community groups was undertaken and the results categorised to identify the means through which the beneficiary made contact with the scheme.

The source was not identified in 762 or 38% of these. The data is presented in the table 4.1.

Table 4.1
Initial source of contact with Scheme by size of applicant group (determined by number of applications received)

	Groups by number of applications					
	50 or more	Between 10 & 50	Under 10	50 or more	Between 10 & 50	Under 10
Beneficiaries	1,008	727	231	647	401	172
	% including source not recorded			% where sources recorded.		
Public Health officials	44%	19%	11%	69%	35%	14%
Community	9%	21%	40%	15%	39%	54%
Family/ Neighbour	6%	7%	14%	10%	13%	19%
Day Care/Home Help	3%	2%	2%	4%	4%	2%
Newsletter/ papers	1%	2%	5%	2%	4%	7%
Gardaí	0%	3%	3%	0%	5%	4%

Source: Sample of 2009 Applications

The number of beneficiaries that identify public health nurses as the initial source of contact in such groups is noteworthy. It would appear that the Scheme may be used to facilitate applications that address health related issues in the main with implications for the governance of the Scheme and future control of equipment supplied. This is further confirmed by feedback from groups that suggests they are approached by public health officials or other intermediaries to sponsor applications.

Community activity as an initial source of beneficiaries appears to be stronger in groups handling smaller number of applications where feedback confirms that groups proactively survey and identify older people at risk. This activity is in keeping with the spirit and structure of the Scheme as initially conceived. In the 1999 evaluation, 44% of beneficiaries identified local community groups as the prime initial sources of contact with word of mouth the second largest source at 16%. In contrast to 10% of beneficiaries identifying An Garda Síochána as an initial source for the Scheme in the 1999 evaluation, none of the applications examined from groups making larger numbers of applications and less than 5% of beneficiaries in groups making smaller numbers of applications identified the Gardaí as the initial source of contract.

4. Improved Targeting of Resources

The current Scheme is targeted at persons aged 65 and over and considered vulnerable. As set out earlier, a vulnerable person has been defined in the Scheme as a person living alone or in a household comprising exclusively of other older people, being a person of advanced age, disability, social or physical isolation, or a victim of crime or anti-social behaviour. Little additional guidance has been given to support community groups in assessing these conditions. In practice, grant aid has been afforded to a broader range of beneficiary provided they met minimum age criteria and were living alone. As indicated in table 4.1 above, in the case of groups making large numbers of

applications a person's health and medical conditions would appear to be the key determinant in a high proportion of cases.

This also supports a view expressed to the Review Team that applications were being proactively initiated from public health professionals by intermediaries who in turn channelled applications through community groups to enable grant support to be obtained. The application form does not enquire if the older person is living alone or with another older person. Simple improvements, such as improved guidance and a code of good practice, could be introduced which would give greater assurance that grants were being properly applied and to give confidence to groups that they operated within the terms of the Scheme. The degree to which community groups proactively identify vulnerable older people is inconsistent across similar types of groups, affiliation and geographic coverage. Good practice is evident across all group types and particularly where groups have an active membership and broader engagement with other organisations locally and the Gardaí.

Coverage

An analysis of applications in recent years indicates poor national coverage. This relates, in the main, to the lack of presence and/or the operation of community groups in the areas affected. The lack of coverage is equally evident in urban and rural areas. Despite the increase in the number of groups applying, coverage appears to have decreased since 2006 when the Scheme moved from an annual well advertised call for applications to an open Scheme which was less well advertised. While the terms of reference of this review did not seek to establish why the Scheme was not been accessed in some areas, it is clear that there is a need to improve the range of information available and to identify suitable community organisations that could administer the Scheme more widely.

One additional issue identified during the review was the number of groups that apply infrequently to the Scheme with consequences for future control of equipment grant aided and continuing engagement with older people. Of particular concern is the frequency observed of groups applying for significant levels of grants on a once-off basis.

The review relied on the county location of the group to draw some general conclusions in relation to the degree to which national coverage had been achieved. Since 2004, over 1,000 groups have received funds in excess of €15 million from the Scheme. The level of grant received was analysed at county level on the basis of the grant per capita of people aged 65 and over in the 2006 Census. A similar analysis was undertaken using the Social Welfare pension data. It is possible to draw some general conclusions from this analysis. The key findings indicate:

- Generally good coverage along the western seaboard, the mid-East and East coast excluding Dublin

- Lower take-up of the Scheme in the border counties, the South East and Cork

- Poor general coverage in the four Dublin county and city council areas despite a good community infrastructure

- Generally weak engagement in some large urban areas and provincial towns.

Age of beneficiaries

In an examination of 15,226 applications receiving grant support in 2008 and 2009, 88% of people supported were aged 70 years or over. Some 12% were in the 65-69 age categories. This indicates a high degree of achievement in terms of targeting. A concern expressed during the review process was that alarm systems were being installed when people were too old to reap the benefits of the systems and that there was a greater need to promote the benefits to persons aged from 70 – 79.

Table 4.2 Age Breakdown of Applicants 2008 and 2009		
Age Group	Number	%
65-69	1,770	12%
70-79	6,745	44%
80 and over	6,711	44%
Total	15,226	100%
Source: Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs		

Persons under 65

Groups frequently identified difficulties in dealing with demand from people under 65 years of age where their personal medical or disability conditions warranted similar supports to older people. Many groups indicated that they met this demand by providing returned and reconditioned equipment after the previous user had discontinued with the Scheme. Feedback from groups identified people under 65 years with restrictive medical and mobility conditions as being a category that would benefit greatly from the Scheme.

Need for guidance

Community groups have expressed difficulties with determining eligibility, particularly when dealing with people perceived to have sufficient means to provide the equipment from their own resources. Feedback from stakeholders confirmed a strong attachment to an entitlement to the Scheme arising from being retired and in receipt of other State benefits.

In addressing this issue, community groups express a strong desire for improved guidance in determining eligibility locally and indicate some concern that the present operations of the Scheme leave it open to poor targeting. While the use of a means test was widely suggested, the overwhelming view from submissions received was that this could not be done locally. Consultation with the Department of Social and Family Affairs indicated a range of difficulties with operating a means tested Scheme with a view that any examination of needs would need to follow protocols in relation to the protection of personal information and the management of risks. That Department also expressed the view that the costs of introducing any form of means testing would have to be balanced against the financial benefits that might be achieved. A general resistance was noted in relation to narrowing the focus of the Scheme or to restrict access to the Scheme by altering the age criteria.

Community groups do not feel sufficiently empowered to resist requests where they feel sufficient means exist or that the risks facing the person or their vulnerability are not well founded. Consequently, they are reluctant to enquire into an older person's personal circumstances and tend to assess eligibility on the basis of what can be outwardly observed and information that would already be within the personal knowledge of members of the community group. While many groups have suggested that the need for assistance could be determined through means testing, they would consider that this is the responsibility of the Department.

Risks

Considerable risks attach to requiring community groups to gather and secure personal information in respect of family circumstances and means. Of particular concern is the need to ensure that personal data is secured from identify theft and the dangers inherent in exposing older people to risk where knowledge of their means and personal circumstances could be liable to be shared in determining eligibility locally. Were data, other than that collected at the moment, to be required to operate the Scheme, the need to control risks could fundamentally alter the operations of the Scheme and place substantial obligations on community groups and control requirements on the Department.

5. Future trends

The population of Ireland, like most of the developing world, is ageing. The number aged 65 years and older is projected to increase from around 11% now to 15% over the next decade. Each year an additional 30-35,000 people will become 65 year of age, this trend will continue to increase as the general population age. With rising life expectancy, the number of people reaching advanced old age is also set to rise. Household composition and weaker family structures arising from social changes such as divorce, improved housing stock and better home services are likely to influence the number of older people living longer in their homes, many living alone, or with an older spouse or older related family members. Over 40% of applicants to the Scheme are people aged 80 years and older in the year of application. As a result of the factors outlined previously, demand for assistive technologies in the home is expected to grow. This will have a consequential impact on demand for the Scheme in the future.

6. Evaluating Effectiveness

The effectiveness of the Scheme depends on the extent to which it is achieving its objectives. Determining the effectiveness of the Scheme requires a clear definition and assessment of the impact of the activities of the organisation. The outputs of the Scheme are easily measured in terms of the number of alarm systems and other equipment installed. Assessing its impact is a more complex challenge and can only be done by measuring improvements in the quality of life and perceptions of security of the older person. More quantitative measures could be used such as additional length of time an older person continues to live independently at home.

The average value of the grant per individual has remained stable over the period 2006-2009 - Table 4.3. However, some increase in the average value can be seen in 2007 when the Scheme

was opened to applications on a year-round basis. The average grant paid increased by 6% from 2007 to 2008 when the scheme began to operate on an open call basis

Table 4.3 Average value of the grant per individual 2006-2009			
Year	Value of Grant Paid	Beneficiaries	Average Grant per Beneficiary
2006	€2,038,074	6,957	€292.95
2007	€3,708,019	10,764	€344.48
2008	€4,312,014	11,762	€366.61
2009[1]	€1,409,727	4,165	€338.47

[1] January to October 2009
Source: Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs

A revised Scheme should clearly set out at the outset, targets for outputs and impacts and the mechanisms by which progress can be measured and assessed.

Chapter 5   Administration and Implementation

1.   Administration and Implementation of the Scheme

The administration and implementation arrangements underpinning the Scheme are relatively simple and reflect the basis on which the Scheme was established. The administrative burdens borne by the older person have been kept simple and do not impose undue requirements over and above providing limited personal information and confirmation that the required equipment has been provided. Arrangements for monitoring are borne by the service provider and the older person without need for further involvement of either the Department or the community group.

Departmental processes

The processes employed by the Department relate in the main to ensuring that the Scheme is operated within the approved guidelines and that applications are processed fairly and promptly. These processes can be summarised as:

- Promotion of the Scheme/Information management

- Ensuring adherence to operational guidelines

- Establishing and confirming eligibility (of groups and individuals)

- Recording of application data

- Payment and management of the grant

- Control and verification that the grant has been applied.

As part of the review process, the Department examined these processes. In general, these operate at a satisfactory level; however, areas for improvements are apparent. The level of public awareness of the Scheme appears to vary considerably. There is also a need for improved guidance available to assist community groups in their work to support older people with their security needs.

Internal processing of grant applications operates relatively speedily where the requirements of the Scheme have been met by the group and approval of grants is possible within a matter of a few days of receipt. Possible improvements have been identified in the manner in which data is recorded and follow on control. Documentation could be simplified and clearer information provided on the Scheme, particular in determining eligibility, ownership and reuse of equipment and the need for continuing contact with the older person by the community group.

In overall terms, there is a need to simplify and more fully explain the processes required of community groups to operate the Scheme. In summary, matters could be significantly improved by a more structured engagement with community groups; removing repetitive processes at application stage, tackling ambiguity through restating the terms and conditions attaching to the grant; and offering better quality guidance.

Processes at community level

Much of the responsibility for the effective implementation of the Scheme rests at local level with the community group. The engagement of community groups has tapped into a knowledgeable and motivated source that would be difficult to replicate by the Department or any agency. As noted in the 1999 evaluation, this engagement has allowed for a sensitive approach and has had a positive spin-off effect in many groups in terms of visibility and fulfilling their remit in terms of community activity, care giving and engagement with older people. In feedback from groups for this review, it has been noted that there is continuing concern with the capacity of many groups to work effectively, particularly when dealing with the administrative and governance requirements of the Scheme. It was also noticeable that many groups making applications on behalf of large number of beneficiaries used the services of an intermediary to operate the Scheme. This raises further concerns around local targeting and ensuring ongoing community engagement with the grant beneficiaries after the equipment has been installed. Use of intermediaries has implications for the governance and control of grants and makes it difficult to ensure that equipment no longer needed by a beneficiary is adequately reused to meet the needs arising locally.

Frequency of application to the Scheme

Data compiled by the Department indicates that two-thirds of groups have made either one or two applications to the Scheme in the years 2003 to 2009 (including 40 groups that made their first application in 2009). The total value of grants received by these groups is just under €3 million or nearly €5,900 each. The frequency of single applications over this period has implications for control and subsequent reuse of the equipment grant aided and presents the Department with particular challenges in maintaining contact to ensure that equipment installed has continued to be used and that in the event of it not being used, that it is made available to another group for reinstallation. Over 60% of single applications are attributable to groups defined as local.

Table 5.1
Frequency of Applications Received 2003-2009

Number of applications made in the period 2003-2009[1]	Number of groups making applications	% of total
1	507	43%
2	281	24%
3	168	14%
4	110	9%
5	69	6%
6	44	4%
7	7	1%
Total	1,186	100%

Source: Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs
[1] Applications received before 7th April 2009

Procurement

The current arrangements in relation to procurement require all groups making applications to provide two quotations from equipment providers in respect of monitored equipment. Practices in obtaining quotations vary considerably; however, it appears that the prices quoted tend to confirm previous relationships between equipment providers and community groups. There is little evidence of community groups switching service providers with quality of past service, accessibility and reliability being key factors in how decisions are made in choosing suppliers. The level of funds paid by the Department is calculated on the value of the lowest quotation received.

Feedback obtained during the consultation process reflected on the burdensome nature of seeking quotations with what appears to deliver little benefit in achieving value for money. The issue of procurement was raised in discussions with equipment providers. In general, most stated that considerable savings could be deliver if equipment was procured in larger numbers. They also noted that the present arrangements did not delivery economies of scale because of the fragmented nature of their relationships with community groups. The manner in which the Scheme was delivered could also be claimed to impose higher delivery costs as purchasing and installation was not regionally based. A general feedback across all stakeholders consulted suggested central procurement by the Department as a means of obtaining better value from economies of scale and improved services for the Scheme.

Reporting requirements

The Department requires that all groups receiving support from the Scheme provide detailed accounts of expenditure in respect of all grants awarded. The following documentation is required to meet the reporting requirements:

- An income and expenditure account showing the receipt of the grant awarded to the organisation under this Scheme

- Original receipts and vouchers to the total value of the grant

- A statement signed by the Chairperson and Treasurer to the effect that the previous grant was used for the purpose for which it was made.

In addition, a declaration signed by each individual who received the equipment is required. While the requirement is that this information is provided within six months of the grant being paid, in practice, reporting requirements are not generally fulfilled until a subsequent application is submitted to the Department. No further applications will be processed by the Department until these reporting requirements are met. Data provided to the Review Team confirmed that despite considerable effort, the reporting requirements in respect of grants made prior to 2008 remain to be completed in at least 10% of applicants.

2. Community Groups

Community Groups by Type

For the purposes of this Review, the Department categorised community groups that received grant support for the years 2004 to 2009 under broad headings as shown in Table 5.2. Nearly two-thirds of successful applicants operated at a defined local level, such as within parish boundaries, town areas, and housing estates or similar areas of operation. In the main, these groups describe themselves as Community Alert, Neighbourhood Watch and Resident's Associations but also include branches of the Irish Countrywomen's Associations and local development groups. In contrast, many senior citizen groups and care providers operate over wider geographic areas.

The majority of community groups do not have a recognised legal structure although all operated under some formal structure recognised locally and affiliated to national organisations. These characteristics are unusual for a publicly funded programme with multi-annual funding relationships.

Given their defined areas of operation at parish, village, town or housing estate level, it is not surprising that their average grant level is lower than for all other types of organisation. The same is largely true for Conferences of the Society of St Vincent de Paul as these operate within parish boundaries or defined housing estates in large urban areas. However, a number of Conferences operate over wider geographic areas particularly in the Dublin area.

Groups operating in larger geographic areas, such as senior citizens, active retirement and carers' groups have received higher levels of grant support in line with their broader geographic remit. It was noticeable that in 2007, 13 carers groups received total grant support of over €380,000 in the Dublin area with 12 groups receiving over €280,000 in 2008. Nationally, excluding Dublin, a similar number of groups that could be defined as social service or care providers received close to the maximum level of grant support.

Table 5.2
Number of Applicant Groups by Broad Type 2004-2009[1]

Type of group	Number		Total Paid €	Share	Grant Average €
Community Alert, Neighbourhood Watch or Local	683	64%	7,041,513	45%	10,310
Senior Citizen, Active Retirement	136	13%	2,821,347	18%	20,745
Social Services, Carer	90	8%	2,566,449	16%	28,516
Conference of St Vincent de Paul	77	7%	1,230,086	8%	23,707
Community Development Projects & Family Resource Centres	30	3%	711,211	5%	15,975
Other types of groups	44	4%	1,378,237	9%	31,324
Total	1,060	100%	€15,748,844	100%	€14,857

Source: Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs
[1] Applications received prior to 7th April 2009

3.   Range and nature of Equipment

The range and quality of the equipment supplied is comprehensive, robust and provides a durable service for the lifetime of the older person. Equipment and monitoring service providers confirmed they held the level of certification and regulation required both in respect of equipment standards and service provision. With respect to the range of equipment provided, the feedback from all stakeholders was that there should be a continuing focus on monitored alarm and smoke detection systems.

Lighting was also identified as an area that support should be continued with arguments being made for the provision of internal emergency lighting. Smoke and carbon monoxide detectors that are monitored featured in consultations with representatives of the Fire Service. Groups confirmed less demand for door chains, window locks and door locks, citing the generally improved conditions of housing stock than heretofore and that where these were required, more remedial work was possibly needed to improve the general condition of the housing stock. A preference was noted in respect of the provision of grant support for peep holes and door viewers which were not explicitly eligible under the Scheme. These were items of home security that were particularly favoured by the Gardaí.

Emergency interior lighting

Access to interior emergency lighting in addition to the high priority afforded to maintaining grant support for exterior security lighting featured in consultation with groups. Whist the incident of power cuts is low in most areas, the feedback from community groups operating in more remote rural areas identified short term electricity interruptions due to storm damage as a concern. Fire officers confirmed the importance of emergency interior lighting for older people, citing concerns that older people tend to use candles in situations where there are electricity interruptions rather than having access to battery powered lighting and were more susceptible to falls. The costs associated with providing a single plug-in emergency lighting source were estimated to range between €25 and €40 and did not require any specialist knowledge to install.

Durability and replacement

Equipment providers indicated that the level of grant support has enabled equipment of good quality and durability to be provided and that in all cases the equipment supplied was expected to last for the lifetime of the beneficiary. Most providers also confirmed that they operated a policy of replacement of older or damaged equipment to the older person without recourse to the sponsoring community group. The value retaining the grant to support the reinstallation of equipment is therefore questionable.

Obsolescence

Estimates provided to the Review Team suggest that some 75,000 units purchased with grant support are currently being monitored professionally. Additionally, a small number of units are monitored or linked to family members and neighbours. The view of all equipment providers was that the rate of technological change in the equipment provided would not affect its long-term viability. However, it was noted that some equipment provided in the early years of the Scheme

may require to be replaced due to age and that the normal lifespan of equipment was between seven and ten years. A number of groups consulted confirmed that the operational life of much of the equipment was not of concern and that the commitment of equipment suppliers to maintain units for the lifetime of the beneficiary underpinned its durability.
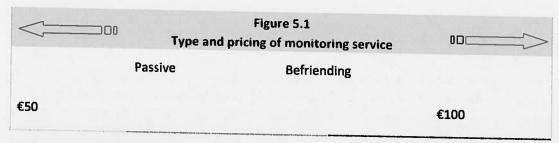
4.   Ownership and Reuse of Equipment

Equipment purchased with grant support from the Scheme remains the property of the community group. Some confusion was evident from a cross section of community groups regarding the ownership of the equipment, especially the pendant alarm. This position was heightened in all groups were intermediaries provided administrative support. While the position is clearly set out on the application guidelines, there is a need to place greater emphasis on the community group's ownership of the equipment supplied and the flexibility this affords the group to deal with unplanned demand. Good practice was widely evident in respect of maintaining lists of recipients in order to track equipment and to enable a declaration to the Department that all previously supplied equipment is in active use. As noted above, the Review Team has concern about the reuse policies where groups have made infrequent applications to the Scheme.

A practice noted in feedback during the consultation process was that many community groups make use of returned equipment to meet the needs of people under 65 years of age who have particular care needs. It is evident from the consultations that such levels of reuse have increased since the suspension of the Scheme.

5.   Monitoring Services

The role of monitoring service providers is crucial to the successful achievement of the objective of the Scheme by providing robust, safe, reliable responses to older people. Estimates provided to the Department during the review indicate that in excess of 75,000 monitoring contracts related to equipment supported by the Scheme are currently active. More traditional, family or neighbour monitored alarms are little in evidence. Annual fees charged for the service vary from €51 to €90; however, the nature of the service provided varies widely. In general, the feedback from community groups suggests a high level of satisfaction with the nature and costs of the monitoring services provided.

As described in Figure 5.1, the monitoring services fall across a broad spectrum and this, in part, determines the price structure. While monitoring is used as a generic term with respect to the service provided, variations in the type of services provided are marked. At the befriending end of the spectrum, companionship with the older person is central to the relationship. Contact is frequently initiated by the service provider and offers the older person a range of add on services such as birthday and diary calls, and enquiry services. On the passive end of the spectrum the service is reactive in nature with contact initiated by the service user. The service providers does not proactively contact the user other than to check that the equipment is fully functioning and to arrange maintenance visits.

Figure 5.1
Type and pricing of monitoring service

Passive　　　　Befriending

€50

€100

Improvements to service

Feedback received during the consultation process consistently expressed satisfaction with the quality of service provided and the reasonableness of the annual costs involved. Concerns raised relate to the transparency of monitoring costs and a need for improved payment methods to ease the burden on beneficiaries. A number of concerns have been highlighted during the Review with respect to monitoring, particularly in the areas of

- Need for service providers to give the older person a clear understanding of service expectations

- Clarity in respect to pricing, payment policies and the opportunities for the development of payment plans

- Need for engagement with family members and the sponsoring community group

- Practices in relation to building good quality customer relations.

Costs

As indicated in Figure 5.1, the annual monitoring fees range from just over €50 to under €100 per annum and reflect the nature and level of service as described above. Research by the European Commission begun in 2008 sought to identify and understand the market barriers which currently hinder uptake of ICT for independent living and active ageing in Europe. The research looked at the situation prevailing in 14 EU Member States, the USA and Japan. This evaluation[1] of community alarm and tele-care services shows that Irish monitoring charges are lower than those charged elsewhere. For instance, service providers in the UK charge €170-€200 annually with many other European countries charging between €200-€300 annually. As noted earlier, it is difficult to determine the compatibility of the product content. In the case of similar Schemes operated in the EU, the general structure adopted is that the local or health authority provides the equipment as no cost to the customer. Monitoring services are either provided by the local authority or call centre contracted by the local authority. The monitoring fee is paid either weekly or monthly to the local or municipal authority. In the case of a number of countries, it appeared that the fee structure included elements of cost recovery in respect of the equipment provided.

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[1] www.ICT-ageing.eu

Regulation

There is no explicit regulation of the service providers although a number of service providers produced accreditation from the Private Security Authority in respect of other areas of their operations. A number of service providers either have or are in the course of obtaining accreditation with the Telecare Services Association's codes of practice which is widely used in the UK and Northern Ireland. To date the Department has not had a regulatory role in respect of such monitoring nor has the Department required monitoring service providers to adhere to any particular regulatory framework on the basis that this was a matter between the end user and the service provider. Given the need to secure the longer term use of grant aided equipment, it may be desirable that the terms of any revised Scheme require only the use of appropriated certified and regulated service providers.

6.   Alignment with broader supports from other public sources

Despite concern that the Scheme duplicates activities funded by other statutory agencies this has not been found to be the case. The types of monitored assistive devices funded by the Scheme are not provided by the Health Service Executive or local authorities. An initiative by local authorities and fire services to provide smoke detectors in older people's home is limited to 500 per administrative county giving little overall coverage. These devices are not monitored unlike similar equipment that is provided under the Scheme and issues of durability and value were raised.

Preference was expressed for the equipment provided under the Scheme due to the ability of having it monitored. There is evidence of good linkages between community groups and public health nurses with the majority citing this as a source of initial contact with a person needing the services. Contact with members of An Garda Síochána is strong where the community group is part of the Community Alert/Neighbourhood Watch initiative but weak or absent in other most other types of community organisation participating in the Scheme. Developments in the home care area and particularly the roll-out of a national home care package offered by the Health Service Executive suggest a need for greater coordination when devising a revised Scheme.

Chapter 6   Response to Consultations

1.   Introduction

A key element of the review process was consideration of the responses by a range of stakeholders to the consultation process. Initially, written submissions were invited from some 840 community and voluntary organisations funded previously under the Scheme between the years 2005 and 2009. The Department requested observations under broad headings drawn from the review terms of reference. In excess of 120 written submissions were received in response to this request. A list of the organisations making submission is set out in Appendix 1. To deepen our understanding of the operation of the Scheme at a local level, the Department conducted almost 100 in depth telephone interviews with representatives of local community and voluntary organisations. The sample was primarily derived from community organisations funded in 2008. The sample also comprised community groups that contacted the Department to provide observations on the Scheme. Appendix 2 sets out a list of the organisations that participated in the telephone survey.

Discussions were held with the Community Liaison Gardaí for Mayo, Sligo and Galway and An Garda Síochána Community Relations Division. The Department also met the Chief Fire Officers for Mayo, Sligo and Galway and held discussions with officials of the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government and the Office of the Minister for Older People in the Department of Health and Children. The Private Security Agency, Health Services Executive and National Standards Authority of Ireland were consulted on aspects of the operation of the Scheme that related to these agencies.

The review team also consulted with representatives of equipment and monitoring service providers with a view to assessing the operation of the Scheme from an industry perspective and to examine the range and nature of equipment and monitoring services available. The review team supplemented these consultations with a number of on-site visits with equipment and monitoring service providers. Written submissions from industry stakeholders were also accepted and considered in the review process.

All consultations were structured on the Terms of Reference set out in Chapter 2.

2.   Objectives of the Scheme

The results of the feedback both written and in the telephone survey are broadly consistent. They suggest some differences in emphasis between the types of organisation consulted and give a generally weak consideration of the community support objective of the Scheme. The feedback received suggests that the majority of community groups consider that the objective of the scheme centres on enabling the older persons to maintain independent living for longer within their own homes and to meet their perceived security and safety needs. Overall, the review found that there had been a high degree of success in achieving positive outcomes in relation to the security benefits of the Scheme particularly the widespread benefits for beneficiaries, specifically in giving peace of mind. In particular, given the nature of the Scheme, it was expected that high

importance would be given to the connectivity and ongoing relationship between the community group and the beneficiary older person.

While feedback confirmed high importance on the benefits of socially monitoring many of the responses appeared to consider this to be the result of the ongoing relationship between the beneficiary and the monitoring service provider. Many groups saw their role ending once the equipment was installed with the monitoring role generally being performed by family members and the monitoring companies.

3.   Improved Targeting of Resources

While there was a broad acceptance of a need for greater targeting of the available resources, many responses indicated that community groups did not possess the necessary expertise to identify those most in need and unable to provide for their own home security needs. Responses varied depending on the type of community group involved. Larger and better resourced organisations placed much greater emphasis on vulnerability in determining eligibility under the scheme and considered that the means of the older person should be established before providing support. Smaller, locally based organisations disagreed with any refocusing of the eligibility criteria and considered that the Scheme should continue to be available regardless of circumstances and means.

Many groups expressed the need for a more structured engagement with local health workers and An Garda Síochána in confirming the needs of beneficiaries. There was also a widespread need expressed for better information and guidance in securing consistency in determining needs. As for coverage, concern was highlighted that the Scheme was overly dependent on active community group members and that parts of the country were poorly served by the absence of community groups capable of delivering the Scheme or through lack of knowledge due to poor advertising.

The majority of responses suggested raising the age limit unless specific circumstances, medical or social, could be demonstrated. Many responses highlighting the need for the Scheme to be made more widely available to people under the age of 65 where they lived with certain medical needs or disabilities and where their means were limited. In general, the introduction of a means test was seen as creating greater difficulty for community groups with lack of expertise and reluctance to enquire into personal circumstances being particular obstacles.

Suggestions for improvements centred on a requirement that eligibility should be along the lines of other State schemes and confined to people in receipt of the Social Welfare Household Benefits Package. This package is made up of three allowances, Electricity or Gas Allowance, Telephone Allowance and Free Television Licence. These allowances provide contributions towards the costs of utility supplies, telephone bill and cover the cost of a person's Television Licence each year. This package is available to people aged over 70 who are resident in the State and to people under age 70 in certain circumstances. Other suggestions were that all application forms should be certified by a Community Garda, public health nurse, GP, occupational therapist or a social worker. It was also suggested that consideration should be given to bring the Scheme within the remit of

the Scheme of Housing Aid for Older People funded by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and administered by each local authority.

4. Administration and Implementation of the Scheme

The overall response to the operation and administration of the Scheme was positive. The level of goodwill expressed was impressive and confirmed that those groups engage with the processes with a high degree of commitment and willingness. However, many responses identified a need for the administrative processes to be simplified to remove what they considered to be repetitive and unnecessary paperwork and requirements that served little or no value. Some commented that there were too many groups involved with many of them covering the same area and some areas poorly covered. Responses varied from concern that there were too many small groups without the necessary capacity. Others suggested the need to confine the Scheme to fewer larger community organisations, like the Society of St Vincent de Paul and Muintir na Tíre to give greater national coverage, efficiencies and economies of scale.

Delays in the application process, lack of flexibility to respond to urgent or emergency cases, and the need to provide the same background material every time an application was made were cited as areas where improvements were needed. Other issues identified included the once off basis on which some groups got involved in the Scheme, providing little opportunity of follow up and the risk of loss of the equipment to the Scheme. Mention was also made of the aging profile of many community activists who have been involved in administering the Scheme for a number of years. Opportunities to simplify the application process were identified in many responses, especially for repeat applicants who are already known to the Department. A number of groups have advocated eliminating the subvention grant on the basis that the savings generated could be allocated for the purchase of equipment.

Feedback regarding the Department was positive with officials viewed as being helpful and solution orientated. Responses from other stakeholders indicated a willingness to engage in more formal engagement of a regular nature with the Department and viewed the absence of such engagement negatively. Awareness of the Scheme and its operations tended to be poor amongst the State agencies consulted. A general response was that closer engagement with the Department and agencies could bring additional benefits to the Scheme's operations and allow for the exploitation of the potential offered by the equipment installed.

5. Range and nature of Equipment

Feedback from groups suggests that there is a high level of satisfaction with the standard of equipment provided, the quality of the installation and the services delivered by equipment suppliers. The majority of responses confirmed that the equipment had an acceptable life span and that the quality of service delivered by the equipment being installed and the monitoring service provided was of a high standard with few negative comments offered by beneficiaries. The technology underpinning the equipment is considered to be very reliable and there are unlikely to be any significant technological advances in the near future that would cause the current range of equipment to become obsolete. A common view from the industry stakeholders consulted was

that the potential for service enhancement was not well understood and that additional support for the older person could be provided at little additional cost.

The quality of the service being delivered by equipment providers is considered to be of a high standard. Feedback suggests that equipment providers are very responsive to the needs of groups and that good relationships are maintained. Equipment is installed quickly and with a minimum of inconvenience to the older person in the majority of cases. The obligation on community groups to tender for equipment does not achieve value for money in the opinion of many of those consulted. Equipment is not purchased in quantities large enough to avail of discounts and thus generate savings. In addition, it would appear that groups prefer to use the services of suppliers/service providers they are most familiar with, ensuring a reliable and trustworthy service.

The main responses from community groups suggested that the only way to achieve improved value for money and maximise the limited financial resources available is for the Department, national organisations or regional agents to procure large scale supplies of equipment and monitoring services. A considerable number of responses stressed the cost effective nature of the Scheme in terms of ensuring an older person could be facilitated to live independently in their homes for longer, reducing the strain on hospital beds and nursing home places.

6. **Alignment with broader supports from other public sources.**

While there was general evidence of good networking with Community Gardaí, Public Health Nurses and Home Helps, some groups indicated little or no contact with these agencies. Many responses from locally based groups indicated a high degree of engagement with other community groups mainly through shared membership. A common suggestion emerged that the Department should be more actively involved with certain aspects of the scheme, perhaps heading up a cross agency group including Gardaí, HSE, Voluntary Groups, and ensure better engagement with Community Employment projects that may be able to undertake some of the work involved. Concern was expressed that crime and threats against older people were perceived to be on the increase. There was a strong belief that the HSE should be responsible for funding those patients who are returning home but need support rather than relying on community groups and the Scheme to meet their needs. Greater alignment with the Care and Repair programme and other community based schemes was advocated.

7. **Reuse of Equipment**

Feedback indicated that practices around the reuse of equipment varied considerably from group to group. The majority of groups seem to be very active in this area and there is a strongly held view among these groups that the equipment remains the property of the community group and should be allocated to someone else when it becomes available. However, a smaller number of groups indicated that they do not reuse/reallocate equipment and seem particularly reluctant to request the return of the equipment when the older person to whom it was given had died or moved to family or residential care. As stated previously, some groups see their involvement ending at the original installation of the alarm and have never reused an alarm. While many groups indicated that they maintained a list of holders of equipment, they felt that there was a

need for greater control of equipment to ensure it was being actively utilised. The idea of a contract between each group and beneficiary would aid reuse of equipment. A number of groups clearly mark the equipment with their names. It was suggested that all equipment should carry a sticker indicating that it is the property of the community group and should be returned to them when no longer required.

8.   Monitoring Services

Feedback from community groups indicates a high level of satisfaction with the existing monitoring services. A common response was that many beneficiaries considered contact with the monitoring service to be as good as having another person living in their home. There is also a general level of satisfaction with the cost of these services, with many groups indicating that it provides good value for money. Nonetheless, there were few suggestions that the Department should subsidise the monitoring fee and that the Department should play a more active part in controlling/determining the type and quality of monitoring and the monitoring fee charged. The main responses from community groups were that monitoring companies should be required to report on the number of alarms active and inactive to ensure greater value for money and also to provide for greater utilisation.

Monitoring costs were generally considered to be unproblematic with few of the groups consulted indicating that a subsidy should be provided. While monitoring costs were generally considered as part of the equipment purchasing decision, greater reliance appeared to be placed on the type and reliability of the service provided with some knowledge that cheaper services were available. A general feedback reflected the need for the older person to take some responsibility for their own needs and the requirement to meet the monitoring costs was part of reinforcing this need.

The response of monitoring service providers confirmed a high degree of customer engagement. Several had devised easy payment plans and all operated a customer retention policy that ensured that service was not terminated due to failure to pay the annual fee. Where fees went unpaid a general approach of contacting the older person and family member prevailed with some instances of the sponsoring group being contacted to ensure that the service continued to be used.

Chapter 7   Conclusions and Recommendations

This Chapter

This Chapter presents a number of conclusions drawn from the review process and presents a number of recommendations.

1.   Overview

This Review has highlighted issues regarding the implementation of the Scheme. Feedback from the consultation process with community groups and stakeholders confirm that substantial benefits accrue to the individuals receiving the grant aided equipment and that these benefits have wider positive effects on the community. In many instances the Scheme has enabled responses and critical interventions when an older person was most in need. These needs arise at significant moments of crisis for the older person perhaps following the death of their spouse, partners or siblings or following discharge from medical care.

While the Scheme as originally designed was a prompt initiative to identified needs it is now timely to strengthen its governance, administrative and control arrangements. Revised arrangements are also appropriate to reflect the significant investment of capacity, goodwill and voluntary engagement that is evident by the work of the community and voluntary sector. In general, the administrative structures established by the Scheme have proved to be effective mechanisms in facilitating local responses and activity with older members of our communities.

Matters identified with the operation of the Scheme since the beginning of 2007 would appear to relate to ambiguity of objectives, the need to improve administrative practices, the role played by intermediaries, and the need for more structured approaches between the Department, community groups and service providers.

Save for where particular issues have been identified, implementation of the Scheme is judged by the vast majority of stakeholders as being very effective, despite there being some variation in interpretation of objective and practice. A range of key success factors that contribute to the successful operation of the Scheme were also identified in the course of the review. These are:

- The specific local knowledge, access and trust that is available from members of community groups in their work with older people in their immediate environs;

- The relatively simple structure of the Scheme based on locally identified needs and a simple application process;

- Goodwill and positive engagement by community groups with the Department and service providers; and

- Defined focus on activities to secure the older person in their home

In overall terms, the Scheme operates in a satisfactory manner but there are a number of issues to be addressed to improve its operations and effectiveness. The review has highlighted a number of

issues internal to the Department which are administrative in nature and which can be implemented within revised processes /work practices.

2. Objectives

Recommendation 1

A revised Scheme is recommended. This should improve clarity around a range of issues identified during the review, simplify applications processes and secure a range of innovations informed by a customer friendly approach. These changes should be supplemented with better information and promulgation of good practice.

Recommendation 2

The community based nature of this Scheme should continue. Therefore, the current objectives will require better articulation and communication. The registration process for community groups should require the demonstration of a longer term commitment by applicant Groups for engagement with the older person. The Department should strengthen the eligibility criteria for registration with the Scheme and increase its focus of community organisations already in receipt of multi-annual funding contract with it and other State agencies.

3. Grant levels

Recommendation 3

The level of grant awarded to each group should be tiered to better reflect the operational profile of the community groups and to ensure better local engagement with the older person. The current arrangements whereby applications are accepted from groups where they do not relate to a defined local geographically area should be discontinued as should the practice of community groups being used to facilitate applications on behalf of third parties.

Recommendation 4

The level of grant per item should be reduced by between 15% and 25% based on quotations already submitted to the Department as part of the existing Scheme. Consideration should be given to national or regional procurement. As a first step, prices for equipment and monitoring services could be displayed on the Department's website.

Recommendation 5

The maximum grant size of €30,000 per annum should be replaced with a grant limits that reflect the nature of the organisation's operational and geographical remit. The amount of the administrative subvention paid to groups should be reconsidered in light of a revised Scheme and discontinued for those organisations in receipt of multi-annual public funding for service delivery for older people and community services.

4. Eligibility

Recommendation 6

It is recommended that the eligibility criteria should remain broadly as they are at present but that the Department should provide improved guidance to improve the quality of local assessment and enable the community groups to operate with greater transparency and consistency. A formal process of means testing should be avoided due administrative, cost and risk management burdens. Consideration should be given to prioritising support on a tiered basis for persons by way of age, living conditions, isolation, means, medical and mobility conditions.

Recommendation 7

Where appropriate, the Health Service Executive should be engaged to ensure that need arising from medical or related issues are addressed as part of an integrated Home Care Package or other supports administered by that Agency.

Recommendation 8

A pre-registration process that requires community groups to assess likely demand in their areas of operation is recommended as part of a revised Scheme. Other demand management techniques should be introduced as an integrated part of a revised Scheme.

5. Range and nature of equipment supported

Recommendation 9

A revised Scheme should maintain support for monitored personal alarms, monitored smoke and carbon monoxide detectors and exterior security lighting as priority items of equipment to be funded. Grant support should be reduced or discontinued for window and door locks and extended to emergency interior lighting and the provision of peep holes and door viewers. Should funding allow, consideration should also be given to supporting the fitting of bogus caller buttons for persons of advanced age.

Recommendation 10

There appears to be little justification for continued grant support for providing for the cost of replacing equipment as these costs are already being met by equipment providers, save in exceptional circumstances.

6. Alignment with other agencies

Recommendation 11

More active engagement is recommended by the Garda Síochána, the local Fire Services and public health officials with community groups. Where they do not already exist, the Gardaí should consider establishing an ad-hoc forum in each Garda District to support the better integration of the Scheme into other support initiatives, including those provided by the local fire services. At

national level, better exchange of information and practice is needed between the Department, the Office of the Minister for Older People, An Garda Síochána and the Health Service Executive and national representative organisations.

7. Communication

Recommendation 12

The Department should engage in a formal exercise with monitoring service providers and community groups to compile local registers of beneficiaries to improve the tracking of equipment and to enable ownership to pass to another group when the original group discontinues its operations.

Recommendation 13

It is recommended that the Scheme should be more widely promoted in areas where it is currently not operating to improve coverage. While this may increase potential demand, implementation of demand management approaches can ensure that the Scheme is more evenly implemented nationally. National organisations, Integrated Companies, community organisations supported by other Programmes, and local authorities should be engaged to identify community groups capable of delivering the Scheme in poorly served areas.

Recommendation 14

Good practice should be identified and communicated to and between community groups implementing the Scheme. Improved guidance on the ownership of equipment should be part of any new arrangements introduced. Submission of an inventory and location of equipment grant supported in the past should form a pre-requisite for registration of groups in a revised Scheme.

8. Monitoring services and costs

Recommendation 15

No case has been made for a subsidy to be provided by the Department to offset the cost of monitoring. Greater dissemination of information by monitoring service providers, national organisations and the Department would enable older people to have access to the range of services available and the associated pricing.

Recommendation 16

The Department and monitoring service providers should continue to work with the National Standards Authority of Ireland and the Private Security Agency to ensure participation in the evolving regulatory environment for the security and monitoring industry.

9. Performance monitoring

Recommendation 17

Research is appropriate to establish the impacts of the supports provided in terms of improvements in quality of life, peace of mind and extension of time living independently. To enable this and the improved communications needed, the Scheme should have a dedicated budget of at least €30,000 or 1% of its annual allocation set aside for evaluation, technical support, information and engagement with groups.

10.   Other matters

Recommendation 18

Equipment and monitoring service providers need to be more proactive in promoting the benefits of their services to older people and to reduce their dependence on grant supported equipment sales.   Service providers should provide clearer information on pricing, especially where monitoring charges are included as part of the purchase prices of the equipment.

Appendix 1 – List of Submissions Received

Written submissions received

- ADA Security Systems, Cork
- Age Action Ireland, Dublin
- An Siol Community Development Project, Dublin
- Annaghdown Community Alert, Galway
- Baldoyle Family Resource Service, Dublin
- Aonad Resource Centre, Galway
- Araglen Community Alert, Cork
- Arklow Active Retirement Association
- Ashford Community Group, Wicklow.
- Avondhu Blackwater Partnership, Cork
- Ballinascarthy Community Alert, Cork
- Ballindaggin Community Alert Wexford
- Ballydonoghue Community Alert, Kerry
- Ballyduff Upper Community Alert, Cork
- Ballylinan/Ballyadams Development Association Laois
- Ballyneale Community Alert, Tipperary
- Banagher Community Alert, Offaly
- Bantry Neighbourhood Watch
- Beaufort Community Alert Group, Kerry
- Bere Island Projects Group Limited, Cork
- Bishopstown Community Association Social Alarms, Cork
- Blackwater Community Connect, Cork
- Bleach and District Community Alert, Kildare
- BREDA Limited, Kildare
- Brenda O'Neill – HSE
- Bullaun Community Alert, Galway
- Buncrana Senior Citizens Committee, Donegal
- Bundoran Neighbourhood Watch, Donegal
- Burtonport, Kinsslagh Community Alert, Donegal
- Cabra Community Development Project, Dublin
- Cabra Community Policing Forum, Dublin
- Cahercorlish Community Alert, Limerick
- Community Alerthir Garda, Sgt Peter Butler
- Camolin Community Alert, Wexford
- Carers Association, Clondalkin, Dublin
- Carers Association, Offaly
- Carers Roscommon, Roscommon

Written submissions received

* Caring for Carers Clare, Clare
* Castlemartyn Community Alert, Cork
* Castletown Community Alert, North Wexford
* Celbridge Community Council, Kildare
* Clare Local Development Company, Clare
* Clonaslee Community Alert, Laois
* Cloughduv Crookstown Community Alert, Cork
* Comeragh Active Retirement, Waterford
* Comhairle Pobail An Spidéil, Galway
* Cooneal Community Alert, Mayo.
* Corrandrum Community Alert, Galway
* Cromane Community Council, Kerry
* Darndale/Belcamp Village Centre Limited, Dublin.
* Déise Active Retirement Association, Waterford.
* Donard Glen Comm. Alert, Wicklow
* Elderly Reassurance, Clondalkin, Dublin
* Drogheda Senior Citizens, Louth
* Dromina Community Care, Cork
* Dun Laoghaire Neighbourhood Watch, Dublin
* Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Development Board
* (copy of submission to National Economic Social Forum), Dublin
* Durras Community Alert, Cork
* East Meath Active Retirement, Meath
* Energy Action Limited, Kerry
* Fahan Inch and Burt Community Alert, Donegal
* Fahy Community Alert, Westport, Mayo
* FORUM Community Employment Project, Letterfrack, Galway
* Fossa Community Alert, Kerry
* Galway Contact, Galway
* Glenbeigh/Cromane Community Council, Kerry
* Glendalough and District Community Alert
* Glenties Community Alert, Donegal
* Global Assets Protection, Tipperary
* Gort Neighbourhood Watch, Galway.
* Grantstown Priory Scheme Limited, Wexford
* Greystones Active Retirement Association, Wicklow
* Inchicore Home Help Service Limited, Dublin
* Irish Rural Link, Westmeath
* Irish Senior Citizens Parliament, National, Dublin

Written submissions received

* Kanturk and Lismire Senior Citizens Association, Cork
* Kenmare Community Alert, Kerry
* Kilfeacle Community Alert, Tipperary
* Killarney Active Retirement, Kerry
* Kilmaine Community Alert, Mayo
* Kilmore Club Security, Wexford
* Kilmovee, Urlaur Community Alert, Mayo
* Kilrush Family Resource Centre, Clare
* Kingscourt Community Alert, Cavan
* Kinlough Community Alert, Leitrim
* Limerick Senior Citizens Club, Limerick
* Listowel Community Alert, Kerry
* Malahide Active Retirement Association (MARA), Dublin
* Maria Joan Nolan, Shillelagh, Wicklow
* Mohill Family Support Centre, Leitrim
* Mrs. Betty O'Brien, Donaghmore, Portlaoise, Laois
* Muckross Community Association, Kerry
* Muintir na Tíre, National, Tipperary
* Na Calaí Community Development Project, Portumna, Galway
* Naas and District Community Alert, Kildare
* Newtown/Donadea Senior Citizens, Kildare
* O'Moore Place Residents Association, Portlaoise, Laois
* Park Road Centre, Cork
* PCDA, Portarlington, Laois
* Portlaoise Employment Group, Portlaoise, Laois
* Presbyterian Residential Trust, Wexford
* Raphoe Friday Seniors Club, Donegal
* Rathcline Neighbourhood Watch, Longford
* Slievemore Road Neighbourhood Watch, Dublin
* Society of St. Vincent de Paul, National Office, Social Justice and Policy Team
* St Catherine's Community Services Centre, Carlow
* St Senan's Social Services, Foynes, Kerry
* St. John's Community Centre, Hacketstown, Carlow
* St. John's Park Residents Association, Waterford
* St. Munchin's Family Resource Centre, Limerick
* SVDP Athlone, Westmeath
* SVDP Blackrock, Louth
* SVDP Dundalk, Louth
* SVDP St Coman's Conference, Roscommon

Written submissions received

* SVDP St. Mary's Conference, Donagh, Monaghan
* SVDP Tubbercurry, Sligo
* TASK Community Care, Dublin
* Terrerath Community Alert, Wexford
* Tinahely Community Alert, Wicklow
* Waterford Area Partnership, Waterford
* Web Project, Dublin
* Westgate Foundation, Cork
* Woodbrook Glen Retirement Association, Wicklow

Appendix 2 – List of Participants in Telephone Survey

Participants in telephone survey

* Adamstown Community Alert, Wexford
* Ardmore Grange ICA Community Alert, Waterford
* Ashbourne Districk Senior Citizens Association, Meath
* Athlone Community Services Council, Westmeath
* Aughrim Kilmore Active Retirement, Wicklow
* Ballinadee Community Alert, Cork
* Ballinlough Community Alert, Roscommon
* Ballintra Laghey Community Alert
* Blackwater Templenoe Community Alert, Kerry
* Bohermeen Active Retirement Group, Meath
* Bohermore Senior Citizens, Galway
* Boolavougue and surrounding districts ICA, Wexford
* BREDA Limited, Meath
* Bruree Rockhill Community Alert, Clare
* Carers Association Longford and Westmeath
* Carers Association, Sligo
* Carers Association, Waterford
* Carers Association, Wexford
* Carnew Community Care
* Carrick-on-Shannon Active Age, Leitrim
* Castlegregory Community Alert, Kerry
* Castletownbere Active Retirement Group, Cork
* Cleggan Claddaghduff Community Alert, Galway
* Cliffoney Active Retirement Group
* Cloughjordan Community Alert and Social Services, Tipperary
* Coolnasmear Community Alert, Waterford
* Cork Road Kingmeadow Resident Association, Waterford
* Cratloe Community Council, Clare
* Cross Roads and Killygordan Enterprise Limited, Donegal
* Culfada Community Alert, Sligo

Participants in telephone survey

* Cushlough Community Alert, Mayo
* Donabate Portrane Senior Citizens, Dublin
* Drimoleague Community Alert, Cork
* Dromahair Killargue Community Alert, Leitrim
* Dunlavin Friendship Community Alert, Wicklow
* Dunmanway Town Community Alert, Cork
* Enniscorthy Active Retirement, Wexford
* Fairymount Community Development
* Ferns Development Association
* Glendalough & District Community Alert
* Glin Community Alert, Limerick
* Gowran Community Alert, Kilkenny
* Inishannon Community Alert, Cork
* Inver Community Alert, Donegal
* Kilbeacanty Community Alert, Galway
* Kildorrery Community Development, Cork
* Killeen Community Alert, Galway
* Killinagh and Glangevlin Community Alert, Cavan
* Kilnaleck Social Service, Cavan
* Kinnegad Coralstown Social Services, Westmeath
* Lavey Community Alert, Cavan
* Leap Glandore Community Alert, Cork
* Letterkenny Community Development Project, Donegal
* Lismore Resident Association, Waterford
* Longford Social Services, Longford
* Louisburgh Lecanvey Community Alert, Mayo
* Maudabawn Community Alert, Cavan
* Mayfield Integrated Community Development Project, Cork
* MCR Neighbourhood Watch, Sligo
* Moate Social Services, Westmeath
* Monasterevan Old Folks, Kildare
* Mourne Abbey Community Alert, Cor

Participants in telephone survey

* Moville Community Alert, Leitrim
* Newbridge Care of the Elderly, Kildare
* Park Road Day Care Centre, Cobh, Cork
* Rahan Community Alert, Cork
* Rathangan Parish Welfare Association, Kildare
* Saula Community Alert, Mayo
* Shanahoe Community Alert, Laois
* Slieverue Community Alert, Kilkenny
* Solas Family Resource Centre, Galway
* South Shankill Neighbourhood Watch, Dublin
* St. Catherine's Community Services Centre, Carlow
* St. Dominic's Community Council, Westmeath
* Stapletown Community Alert, Kildare
* SVDP Bailieborough, Cavan
* SVDP Ballinasloe, Galway
* SVDP Claremorris, Mayo
* SVDP Cootehill, Cavan
* SVDP Hospital, Limerick
* SVDP Kiskyre, Meath
* SVDP Mitchelstown, Cork
* SVDP St. Gabriel's, Dublin
* SVDP St. Peter's, Milford, Donegal
* SVDP Tuam, Galway
* The Evergreens, Kildare
* Tipperary Community Council, Tipperary
* Tirellan Active Retirement, Galway
* Truagh Development Association, Wexford
* Virginia Community Alert, Cavan
* We The People Community Development Project
* West Kerry Care for the Aged, Kerry.