

Getting ready for LINKs

Local Involvement Networks Bulletin

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About this bulletin

Welcome to the Local Involvement Network (LINKs) Bulletin

This bulletin has been developed to help keep you up-to-date with the latest developments on plans to introduce LINKs.

This bulletin will be of particular interest to:

- NHS staff working on Patient & Public Involvement (PPI) programmes;
- Local Government staff working on user involvement programmes and the procurement of 'host' organisations for LINKs;
- Voluntary and community sector organisations who are interested in providing a 'host' service to the new LINKs or becoming a member of a LINK, including those that provide forum support services;

- Current PPI Forum members; and
- Health and social care regulatory bodies with PPI interests.
- Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee members

Please feel free to circulate this bulletin to colleagues, display it on relevant notice boards or publish it on your internal intranet sites.

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Voice piece

Gearing up for implementation

Meredith Vivian, Department of Health

With LINKs due to become operational from April 2008, now is the time for local communities to start to get ready.

Local Involvement Networks could significantly strengthen the way local communities influence health and social care services. However, for LINKs to realise their potential, a lot of work needs to take place between now and next Spring.

Activity is already taking place. Some councils have started the process to appoint a 'host' organisation to set up and establish their LINK. While some stakeholders have formed working groups to plan what their LINK will look like.

Similar activity needs to take place in every area if LINKs are to build on what already exists. To help, the Government has put in place resources to assist communities in gearing up for LINKs. In addition to publishing information on planning a network and appointing a 'host', the Department of Health has also sent £10,000 to the 150 local authorities to support their work to get ready for LINKs. I have also written to local authorities with further recommendations and suggestions about the work they can commence

now to provide the foundations for an effective LINK.

I have heard from many quarters of the activity already underway to make LINKs a reality. The work of the Early Adopter Projects has been tremendously fruitful, and the enthusiasm of those of you in local authorities, in patient's forums, forum support organisations and the VCS is beginning to build real momentum around the country. I know that we have a great deal of work to do but it feels to me as if we are developing a real head of steam. We shall continue to do our best to give you as much information as possible as soon as it becomes available – and we intend to continue to report back to you developments as they arise.

News in brief

Latest developments on LINKs

Legislation up-date

The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill, which includes provisions for establishing LINKs has recently completed its Committee stage in the House of Lords. Parliament has now adjourned for summer recess, but when it reconvenes in October, debate on the bill will continue. We expect it to have been passed by both Houses of Parliament by November, after which it will become statute.

Transcripts of the debate can be found online on the Hansard Website under the debates that took place on

the 23rd July:

<http://www.parliament.uk/publications>

Minister sets out LINKs vision

The new Health Minister responsible for patient empowerment, Ann Keen MP, has called on the NHS and local government to give more people a greater say over the health and social care they receive.

Launching two new 'Getting ready for LINKs' resources to help local authorities and the NHS prepare for replacing the current system of patients' forums with LINKs, Health Minister, Ann Keen, said:

"Services get better when they listen to the people that use them and respond to what they want. We know that the vast majority of people think that having a say in local health and social services is important, but we need more people to take an active role. For this to happen, getting involved must be simple and convenient."

"We will be engaging widely with local communities as part of the NHS Next Stage Review, and LINKs are an important part in making sure that local people continue to play a central role in the design of local services."

To read more visit

www.dh.gov.uk/pressreleases

'Planning your Local Involvement Network'

The first document incorporates the findings from nine LINKs 'early adopter' sites. It sets out what local communities should think about to prepare for LINKs, such as the list of actions that local councils could take, who might be involved in establishing LINKs, the resources required and how a network could work.

'Contracting a host organisation for your network'

This second publication gives local authorities the information they need for procuring a host organisation to establish and support a LINK. It includes the services a host will be required to provide and a process to follow for establishing a network. This document provides the service specifications and tender requirements for the provision of a host organisation to support a local involvement network (LINK).

Both 'Getting ready for LINKs' resources can be found at www.dh.gov.uk/patientpublicinvolvement.

Early findings from the early adopter sites

A report has been produced that summarises the progress and lessons from the LINKs early adopter projects.

Nine early adopter sites – supported by the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health (CPPIH) and the Healthcare Commission - have been thinking through what steps local communities might need

to take to establish a network, as well as the approaches that might help to make a LINK successful.

The report 'Gathering the learning' draws on these experiences and provides a snapshot of some of the findings from these sites. The report is due to be published in mid August.

To download a copy visit:

<http://www.nhscentreforinvolvement.nhs.uk/>

In focus

The powers of LINKs – what are they?

Under the legislation that will make LINKs possible, the proposed powers of LINKs include the ability to:

- enter specific types of services and view the care provided
- ask for information and get a response within a specific timescale
- make recommendations and get a response within a specific timescale
- refer matters to the local Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee and get a response

These proposed powers resulted from an extensive 'Stronger Local Voice' consultation exercise in 2006 – to which over 500 responses were received (see:

<http://www.dh.gov.uk/Publications>).

In the 'Government Response to A Stronger Local Voice' (published in December 2006), the Department of Health addressed concerns about members of LINKs being given the same powers as current patients' forums to inspect health and social care premises.

We think the power to enter specified types of premises and view the services provided is important for LINKs to be effective.

Concerns have been raised about the fact that LINKs will be excluded from entering some services under some circumstances. Whilst the power to enter and view services is important for LINKs, we also recognise - along with many stakeholders - that this cannot be a carte blanche to enter under any circumstances.

Safeguards

There are many factors that need to be addressed, including patient confidentiality, safety and the smooth delivery of services. For example, we do not think that it would be appropriate for LINKs' members to enter: operating theatres during surgery, or services out side of opening hours, or people's homes.

The Government also think that the people who conduct LINKs' visits should have appropriate training, and that they should have criminal records bureau checks, to ensure that these visits are conducted safely and sensitively.

These limitations and more information on how the powers of LINks will work will be set out in regulations once the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill receives Royal Assent.

The Government are determined to get these regulations right and so we will be consulting on them before they are placed before Parliament. More information on this will be published by the Department soon.

Getting ready for LINks in Warrington

Like many authorities across England, Warrington Borough Council has started to get ready for LINks by deciding how they are going to find a host to set up and support its network.

To help develop a 'fit for purpose' commissioning strategy and accompanying tendering process, the authority has undertaken (or is undertaking) a number of steps.

Gathering intelligence

The authority has gathered some of the intelligence it needs by liaising with a range of key stakeholders including: neighbouring authorities, the local Patient and Public Involvement Forum (PPIF), the Manchester LINks Early Adopter Project together with all relevant sections from the Department of Health and the Commission for Patient & Public Involvement in Health (CPPIH). The PPIF has also

begun mapping the work it currently carries out.

An event with key stakeholders was held in June to share views and develop ideas as to how the LINK might 'look' and function. The event included the council, Warrington PCT, the local NHS Trusts, voluntary sector players, PPI forums and Warrington's PPIF current support organisation.

To this information, the council intends to add its own intelligence built up from a range of sources including service activities, community engagement and work with user groups as well as more generic contact and communication with wider community.

The Council's Procurement Section has also been engaged to advise and manage the procurement process for the host. To ensure the stability of the project an initial three-year contract has been proposed. As the anticipated expenditure is likely to exceed £150,000, the advice of the procurement team is that the tender would have to follow the European tendering requirements.

More about tendering

After reviewing the CPV codes for European tendering the Procurement Section decided that the tender was not an exempt service under Part B and that the service more closely fits under the description of a Market Research and Public Opinion Polling Service than the codes for Health and

Social Services. The tender therefore would have to follow all the requirements of European Tendering and an OJEU notice was duly posted to start the process.

To ensure that a host is operational by April 2008, the council has decided on a two-stage “restricted” tendering procedure. Stage one involves advertising for expressions of interest and the completion and assessment of a pre-qualification questionnaire (PQQ). The PQQ is prefaced with brief information regarding the Council’s requirements and references to Government policy. Stage two involves inviting a limited number of potential hosts who have passed the assessment process to submit a tender.

Using the restricted procedure has several advantages, these include:

- Being able to start the process straight away, as the tender and specification do not need to be finalised until stage two
- Cutting down the tender period required after the development of the specification.
- Giving confidence to those tendering because they know they only have a few competitors and therefore it is worth committing to individual tenders. This approach also frees up the resources of those that are not invited to participate in an individual process to pursue other opportunities.

The timetable

Warrington Borough Council’s timetable provides sufficient time to develop the tender, involve local stakeholders and ensure the selected host has a sufficient lead-in period.

Date	Action
9/7/07	Issue OJEU notice inviting expressions of Interest. Advertise in local press Issue PQQs as requested (40 day requirement under OJEU)
20/8/07	Deadline for request of PQQ
28/8/07	Deadline for submission of PQQs
21/09/07	Issue invitations to tender (to a minimum of 5 capable providers) (tender period a minimum of 35 days)
29/09/07	Deadline for the receipt of tenders Tender assessment and presentations/interviews of tenderers
30/11/08	Contract award (subject to 10 day mandatory standstill period)
1/04/08	Contract commences

Anyone requiring further information about Warrington’s process should contact its procurement team on 01925 443 905 or e-mail centralprocurement@warrington.gov.uk

What should I be doing now?

Suggested actions for different stakeholders

Local Authorities (LA's) can start to raise awareness of LINK's using existing mechanisms such as newsletters, local media, websites & meetings. They can provide information about LINK's and explain how community stakeholders [public, users of health & social care services, their carers, as well as community & voluntary sector groups & organisations] how they can get involved. It is particularly important information should be available to all sectors of the community, particularly those that are seldom heard, minority groups & those with special communication needs.

To help plan for LINKs, many authorities are helping to facilitate the establishment of a 'Getting Ready for LINK's' working groups made up of key local representatives from the major stakeholder groups who will be involved in, or need to work alongside, the LINK. At a minimum, membership should probably include:

- People who use health & social care services
- Voluntary & community sector organisations & networks
- Members of existing Patient & Public Involvement Forums
- Local Authority leads for procurement, commissioning, scrutiny and community engagement
- NHS PCT leads for commissioning & patient & public involvement

- Social care leads for user involvement & commissioning
- Health & social care regulatory bodies

LA's also need to begin the process of procuring a host, this is likely to involve promoting LINK's to any potential host organisations [particularly voluntary organisations & social enterprises who may be interested in tendering], working with local stakeholders to inform the tender materials (such as a contract specification)

'Getting Ready for LINK's Working Group' - once up and running - can develop a plan to establish their local LINK. This needs to be based on a shared understanding of the LINK's role & functions. The members of the group should take ownership of the plan & work in partnership to undertake a range of early activities to prepare their community for the establishment of a LINK. Key activities could include:

- Developing a stakeholder/community map of the area identifying existing groups/networks & the connections/relationships between them
- Developing a community profile identifying population groupings, local health & social care issues, priorities & preferences
- Developing & implementing a communication plan to raise awareness of the LINK's role & how to get involved

- Developing an engagement plan building on existing relationships & networks to ensure that a range of approaches are used to enable local people & groups to effectively & appropriately engage with the LINK

Social care organisations (whose sector was not covered by the old system) can begin raising awareness of LINKs – and the changes they will bring - amongst staff, the people who use services and their carers.

Voluntary and community organisations/groups & interested citizens can become engaged with the LINK development process & activity to procure the Host. Voluntary sector infrastructure bodies can assist awareness raising & engagement by disseminating information on LINK's to local groups through their existing networks, communication channels & contact with community leaders.

A range of people and networks have a key role in helping to raise awareness of LINKs. These include:

- LA, leads for Community Engagement, Overview & Scrutiny or Procurement,
- Social Care user involvement/community engagement leads.
- PCT Patient & Public Involvement (PPI) leads,
- PPI Forum members,
- Voluntary & community networks

- Social Care user involvement/community engagement leads.

Representatives from organisations & individuals interested in the LINK development can participate in the 'Getting Ready for LINK's Working Group' & get involved with the development activity.

Groups and individuals can also input into developing the local contract specification for the host, which is likely to be based upon the Department of Health. By feeding into this process, local stakeholders can ensure that the specification reflects the characteristics of the local area & that an appropriate Host is more likely to be procured. Those interested in participating in this activity should contact their local authority.

Existing patient forum members have a lot of knowledge and experience and they can play an important role in helping in advising about how to set up LINKs.

Diary

Delivering NHS Public Consultation: Best Practice & Innovation Conference

Date: 11th September 2007

Venue: The Mary Seacole Building, The University of Salford

Further information: and to register visit <http://www.bpipc.org.uk/>.

Regional Events for Local Authorities – The Centre for Public Scrutiny & the NHS Centre for Involvement

Provisional Dates and venues: 13th September (Birmingham), 24th September (Leeds), 3rd October (London), 9th October (Bristol)
Four regional 'Getting ready for LINKs' events have been arranged to help councils involved in establishing LINKs to:

- understand the rationale for LINKs and their impact;
- begin discussions with local people and groups about how to develop the local LINKs;
- understand the skills that will be required from 'host' organisations and the timescales for contracting with a suitable 'host'; and
- establish good relationships between the executive, overview and scrutiny committees, the 'host' and the LINK.

Each local authority will be able to nominate three delegates.

Further information: about these events can be found at www.nhscentreforinvolvement.nhs.uk

Involvement to Impact Conference and Awards

Date: 28th – 29th November 2007
The NHS Centre for Involvement is now taking submissions for their first annual awards. The Involvement to Impact Awards 2007 aims to highlight and celebrate the high quality work that is being done to involve patients and the public in NHS decision-making and service development.

Entries from all NHS, voluntary network and social care organisations are welcome. The closing date for entries is 31 August 2007 and the winners will be announced in November.

Further information:

www.nhscentreforinvolvement.nhs.uk

Further information

To find out more about Links

Visit:

<http://www.dh.gov.uk/PatientPublicInvolvement>

To get more Patient and Public Involvement resources

Visit: www.library.nhs.uk/ppi

To find out more about current patient involvement practice or the LINKs early adopter sites visit:

www.cppih.org or

www.nhscentreforinvolvement.nhs.uk

Contact us

Help shape this bulletin

We welcome your ideas and comments that will shape the format and content of this bulletin in the future. This bulletin is published on a monthly basis. Please email:

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