

Local Involvement Networks explained



What is a Local Involvement Network (LINK)?

A LINK will be a network of local people, organisations and groups that want to make care services better.

A LINK will give you the chance to say what you think and to suggest ideas to help improve services. They will be expected to represent everyone. A LINK will also work with care professionals to make sure your views are heard.

There will be a LINK in every Local Authority area that has social services responsibility.

LINKs will encourage and support local people to get involved in how local care services are planned and run. They will listen to local people about their needs and about their experiences of services.

LINKs will look at all health and social care services in an area that are funded by taxpayers. It will not matter whether they are provided by the NHS, a local authority, a private company, a social enterprise or a charity.

LINKs will feedback this information to the people responsible for commissioning, providing, managing and checking up on health and social care services so that things can change for the better.

LINKs will not take over from groups that are already working for the community. Instead, because LINKs will bring together the whole community and will have certain powers, they should make it easier for groups and individuals to be heard.

LINKs around the country will have the same powers and responsibilities, but each LINK will be set up in a way that works best for its local community.



Why are LINKs being set-up?

There have been changes over the past few years in how health and social care services are planned and run. All of these changes aim to make services better. People are being offered more choice in the services they get and who provides them. Health and social care services are working more closely together. Services are also trying to listen more to people who use them about their needs.

There have been different ways for people to have a say in health services over the years. In 2003, the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health was set up. Their job has been to support different ways for people to have a say in how health services are run. They support Patients' Forums. There is a Patients' Forum in every NHS Trust and Primary Care Trust.

In 2005, the Department of Health looked at how this was working. In 2006, the White Paper 'Our health, our care, our say' was published.

It said that people should have 'more choice and a louder voice'. It said that local communities should be able to have more say in the way in which the whole health and social care system is designed and works.



Ideas about how to do this were published in July 2006 in a report called 'A Stronger Local Voice'.



It said that there needed to be new organisations called Local Involvement Networks – known as LINKs. These will be a new way for people to have a say in how health and social care services are planned and run.

LINKs will replace Patients' Forums and the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health will stop.

What will LINKs do?

The job of a LINK is to:

- Give everyone the chance to say what they think about their local care services – what is working well and what is not so good
- Give people the chance to check how care services are planned and run
- Feedback what people have said about services so that things can change for the better

What Powers will LINKs have?

LINKs will have a range of powers so that they can say how local services should improve. They will be able to:

- Make reports and recommendations and get a reply within a set amount of time
- Ask for information and get a reply within a set amount of time
- Go into some types of services to see what they do
- Tell elected politicians on an Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) what they have found and get a response.



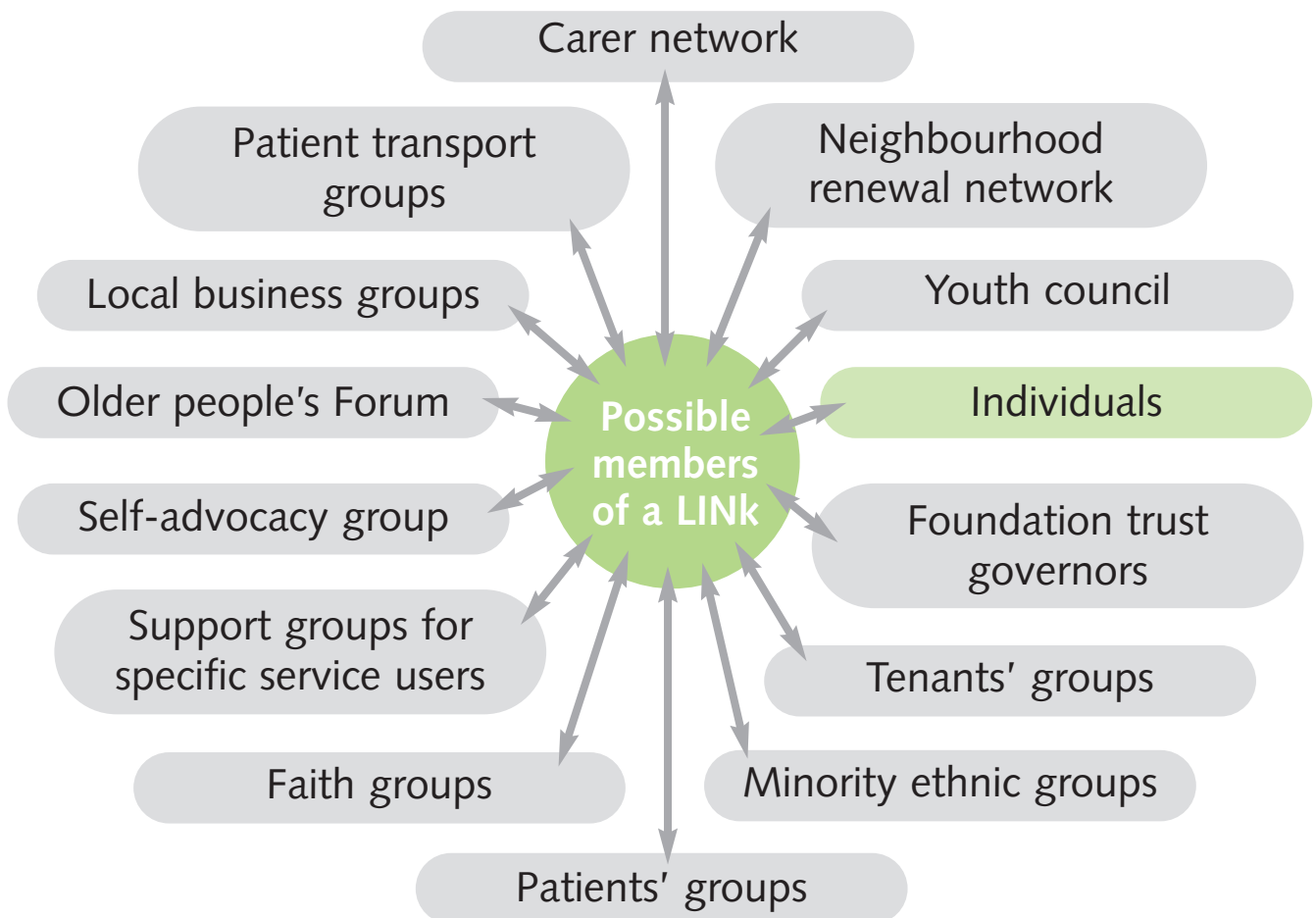
Who can be part of a LINK?

Anyone can be part of LINK. A LINK should be able to represent everyone in the community. This means all of the different groups and types of people that make up the local population will be able to join. They should also be able to give people who do not usually have a say the chance to give their views.

LINKs members will include:

- User-led organisations
- Local voluntary and community sector organisations
- Individual people

BUT ... you do not have to be a member of a LINK to get involved or have your say.



How will LINKs be set up?

The rules about LINKs and how they will work are part of the **Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act**. In the back page of this booklet, there is a poster that shows the steps to setting up a LINK.

The Act received Royal Assent in October 2007. Under the Act Patients' Forums will be abolished in March 2008 and LINKs will start being established from April 2008.

Each **Local Authority** will get money from the Department of Health. They will use this money to pay a **host organisation**. The host will be responsible for setting up the **LINK** and giving practical support to keep it going. If a host is not in place by April 2008, the Local Authority will have a duty to make sure that LINKs activities are carried out until the host is recruited.



Host



LINK



What will the Host do?

The job of the host organisation is to support the LINK to do its work. The LINK will need to decide what work it does and when.

The host might be a local community or voluntary organisation. They will have shown that they understand the local community and are good at working with groups and people.

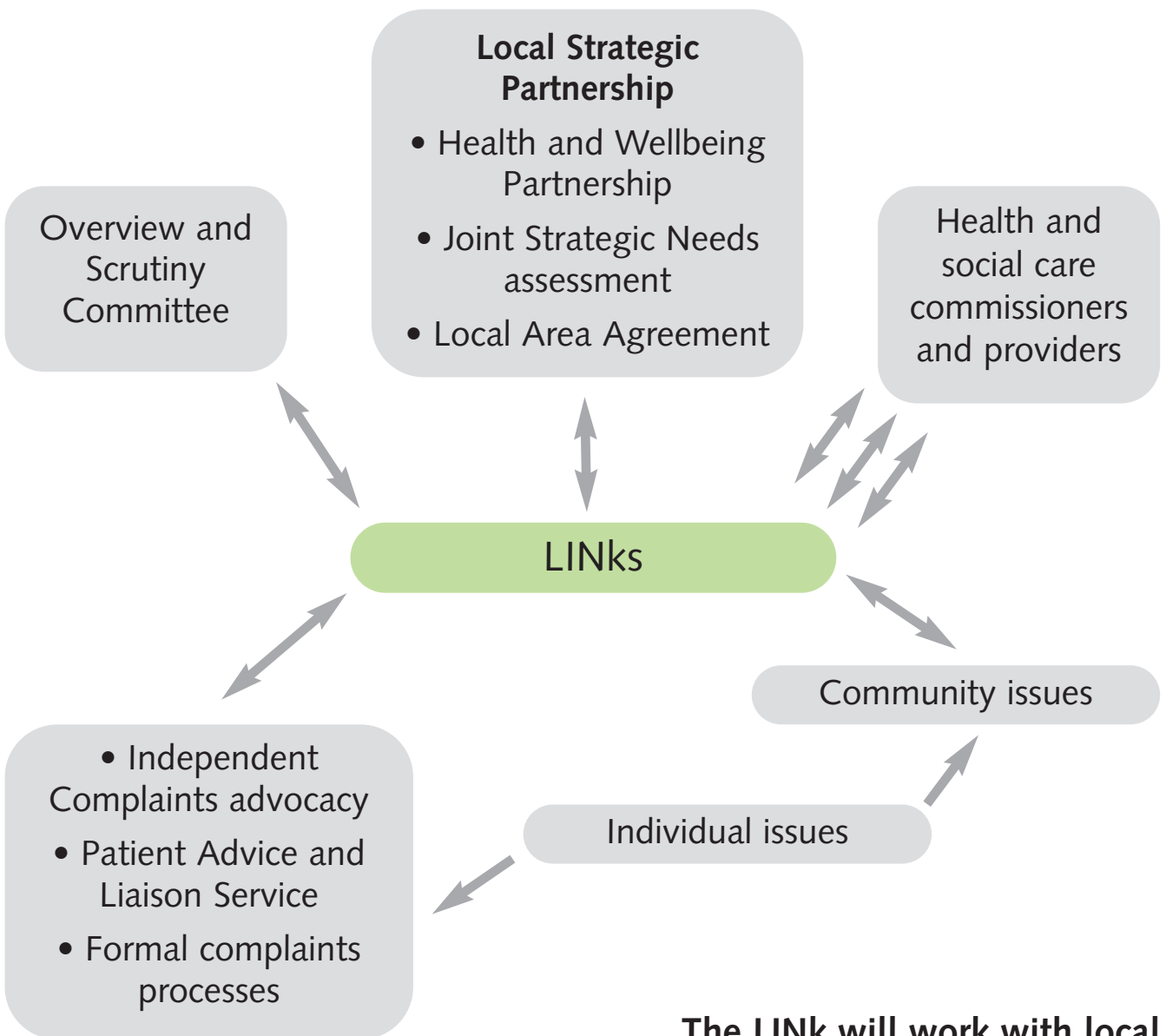
The job of the host will be to:

- Help the LINK to set up, for example by:
 - telling the community that a LINK is being started
 - holding meetings so people can come and hear about what the LINK will do

- encouraging local groups, organisations and individuals to get involved, especially those who are not always heard
- Work with local people and groups to set up how the LINK will work locally and how it will decide what to do. This will include the rules about:
 - how decisions are made
 - how people can get involved
 - what happens if people do not agree about things
 - how people can have a say as a group or as an individual person
- Hold the money for the LINK and be responsible for keeping records of how money is spent



- Regularly letting local people know what the LINK is doing and asking them for their views
- Keep good records of what the LINK does and who is involved
- Provide advice and support to the LINK
- Make regular reports to the Local Authority about how it is supporting the LINK. Help the LINK to write a report every year about what they have done and how the money has been spent
- Work with other strategic organisations and partnerships locally



The LINK will work with local organisations and partnerships

Getting started

To make sure that LINKs are able to build on the work of Patients' Forums from the start, a lot of work is taking place to get ready.

There has been an Early Adopter Programme in nine places across England that have been trying out how LINKs might work. The lessons from these places have been used to produce national guidance on the things communities and local authorities need to do to prepare for LINKs.

Local authorities and communities can:

- look for organisations to become a host for their LINK
- plan exactly how and when their LINK will be set up
- tell people in the community about LINKs
- bring together people from all the important groups that will need to work to make LINKs happen. They can start to think about how things will work in their local area

Things that Local Authorities and communities need to be thinking about as they plan their LINK:

- What do we know about the local area, the groups and organisations and what local people think is important?
- What do we know about the different ways that people like to be involved?
- What could make it hard to set up a good LINK in this area? For example, is it a rural area, is transport difficult, are there lots of different ethnic groups to include; are there lots of groups who do not get a good deal from care services?
- What networks are there already working in this local area?
- What are the things we do not know about and how can we best find them out?



More information?

If you would like more information about LINKs then go to one of these websites:



www.dh.gov.uk/patientpublicinvolvement



The National Centre
for Involvement

www.nhscentreforinvolvement.nhs.uk
Register on the Home page



www.cppih.org
Go to the Knowledge Management System (KMS)
Go to Changing NHS: LINKs, Early Adopter pages

Care Services Improvement Partnership **CSIP**

www.csip.org.uk
Search for 'Local Involvement Networks'


The Steps to Setting up a LINK




Local Authority talks to local people and organisations about what they would want from their LINK.



Local Authority gets money from Government for a LINK.



Local Authority tenders for a host organisation which is the best one to set up and support the LINK.



The host works with local people and organisations to set up and support their local LINK.

They decide how it should run and the support it will need from the host.



The LINK starts to work!

Supported by the host, the LINK:

- Gives everyone a chance to say what they think about their local care services.
- Checks how care services are planned and run.
- Feedbacks what people have said about services so that things can improve.

The local Authority and the LINK check regularly to see how well the host is working to support the LINK.



Care Services Improvement Partnership **CSIP**

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