

Local Involvement Networks (LINKs) Bulletin

Issue 3 – May 2007

Gateway reference 8361

About this bulletin

This bulletin is of particular interest to:

- NHS staff working on Patient & Public Involvement programmes;
- Local Government staff working on user involvement programmes and the procurement of LINKs;
- Local authority health and social care overview and scrutiny committee members and support staff
- Voluntary and community sector organisations which 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 Patients' Forum members; and
- Health and social care regulatory bodies with PPI interests.

We would ask that you forward the bulletin to all members of your team who may benefit from this information. You may wish to print and display this bulletin on all relevant notice boards or arrange to have it published on your internal intranet sites.

Website links

If you are reading a printed copy of the bulletin, you may not be aware that further information is available on most items. The DH website is under construction to update the information you may be seeking. We expect it to be fully functional soon. In the meantime, you can still access the online version of the at:

<http://www.dh.gov.uk/PolicyAndGuidance/OrganisationPolicy/PatientAndPublicInvolvement/fs/en>.

Feedback

We welcome your ideas and comments that will shape the format and content of this bulletin in the future. The next edition will be published soon. Please e-mail ppimailbox@dh.gsi.gov.uk or write to the PPI Policy Team, Room 502A, Skipton House, 80 London Road, London SE1 6LH.

Introduction

Welcome to the May edition of the LINKs bulletin. This edition is focusing on commissioning.

TOP STORY

Commissioning

Local authorities, as well as primary care trusts (PCTs) have a huge amount of influence over health and social care services, as they commission those organisations which provide these services. This power has increased in recent years, as more funds and independence have been devolved to PCTs to make decisions about healthcare commissioning.

The commissioners of services not only make assessments as to what services are needed in an area, but also decide where the services will be provided, how they will be provided, and pay for these services. They also, ultimately, have the power to change which services they commission in an area.

Given the fundamental role that commissioners of services have, it is vital that we think about how LINKs can most effectively inform the commissioning process. LINKs will provide an enormous opportunity, both for people to feed their views into commissioners to influence services, and for commissioners to access the views of people using services in their area.

The *Commissioning framework for health and wellbeing* was published for consultation in March this year. It is about practical action, encouraging local commissioners to take the opportunity to make a real difference by focusing on delivering the services that people want for themselves and for their communities.

The framework identifies eight steps to more effective commissioning:

- Putting people at the centre of commissioning
- Understanding the needs of populations and individuals
- Sharing and using information more effectively
- Assuring high quality providers for all services
- Recognising the interdependence between work, health and well-being
- Developing incentives for commissioning for health and well-being
- Making it happen – local accountability
- Making it happen – capability and leadership

The framework sets a challenge to commissioners in how to make greater local voice, choice and control a reality. Too often, services are commissioned on a 'one size fits all' basis, insufficiently flexible to meet people's needs and preferences. And the impact of 'voice' is variable, with local people frequently involved only after a strategy or plan has been published, rather than being integral to its development.

People's views and experiences must underpin the commissioning process. The framework suggests a number of ways in which the voice of local people could be strengthened, including;

- Engaging with Local Involvement Networks (LINKs).
- Supporting advocacy approaches for groups who find it harder to express their views. Third sector organisations have an important role in this area, in helping commissioners to identify and access vulnerable groups, as well as providing advocacy where appropriate
- Explaining, publicly and regularly, how they draw on the views of local people to shape priorities and service improvements

The publication of the commissioning framework supports the agenda of involving local people in the commissioning process. LINKs will have an important role in gathering and representing people's views to commissioners, and the relationship between LINKs and commissioners will be one of the most important for both parties to develop.

Commissioning - Early Adopter Projects (EAPs) developing interface with the NHS

The LINKs Early Adopter sites are starting to explore the LINK/Commissioning interface. A key project objective for the sites is to understand how best to develop effective relationships with health and social care commissioners (Practice Based Commissioning Groups, Primary Care Trusts, Specialist Commissioning Groups, local authority commissioners and joint commissioning groups) and to evaluate how an effective relationship might work.

LINKs, in conjunction with health and social care stakeholders, will need to develop robust processes to ensure that the views of local people are appropriately and effectively conveyed to commissioners. LINKs will develop processes for systematically collecting and analysing local views, as well as, identifying trends, issues and priorities for the improvement of local care services.

The LINK may, for example, consult their networks to undertake a specific piece of work that will inform the commissioning of a care pathway. The LINK will have experience of the whole health and social care spectrum and so will be in a strong position to comment on all parts of a care pathway, rather than small segments of it. The LINK's recommendations will therefore be valuable to commissioners.

Discussions with PCTs and Practice Based Commissioning groups have been initiated in most of the Early Adopter communities through local Project Groups. Sites are progressing this objective in different ways. The latest information about the work of the EAPs, as well as reports of their events and learning can be found on the NHS Centre for Involvement's website under "Local Involvement Networks" and then "What's New": <http://www.nhscentreforinvolvement.nhs.uk>

Focus on the NHS – What can LINKs do for you in Commissioning?

The intelligence that LINKs collect will be of immense interest and value to commissioners of services within PCTs and local authorities, as well as those engaged in practice based commissioning. LINKs will give commissioners access to detailed feedback based on the experiences and views of local people. LINKs will be able to use this intelligence to make informed recommendations to commissioners of services.

LINKs will also be able to undertake research and evidence collection on behalf of commissioners, to be used in the development of commissioning plans. LINKs will be valuable to commissioners, in the roles of adviser, researcher and critical friend.

Information from LINKs will:

- Assist commissioners in making informed decisions about local needs;

- Help managers to know if the services that they have commissioned meet local need and user expectations, this will assist them in their contract management role; and
- make valuable intelligence and evidence based feedback from recipients of services available to providers, commissioners, scrutineers and regulators of services.

LINks will also provide a valuable mechanism to assist NHS organisations in fulfilling their statutory duty to involve and consult patients and the public in the development, planning and operation of services.

The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill will also make it a duty for PCTs to report on the activities they have carried out for listening to local people, and what actions they will take in response to the views that they have heard. This report on consultation activities could form an important part of the Prospectus which each PCT will produce annually (details of this are set out in Health reform in England: Update and Commissioning Framework, which was published in July 2006). This document requires PCTs to ensure that LINks are involved in the commissioning process, and are able to feed their views into the development of the PCT Prospectus.

The Commissioning Framework also requires Practice Based Commissioning (PBC) groups to have arrangements in place to seek people's views. LINks can also help with this process, supporting the involvement of people at this more local level.

As LINks will provide an authentic and inclusive voice, commissioners and service providers need to recognise the value that LINks offer in helping them shape and develop services. NHS organisations need therefore to be proactive in developing relationships with their LINK.

Early Adopter Projects - Products

You will be interested to learn that a number of reports have been produced from some of the Early Adopter Projects and can be found on the NHS Centre for Involvement's website at www.nhscentreforinvolvement.nhs.uk and then click on the Local Involvement Networks button. The products include:

- Durham EAP Stakeholder Event Report
- Durham EAP 'Investing in Children' Report – how a LINK can best engage with young people
- Manchester Stakeholder Event Report
- Healthcare Commission Early Learning for EAPs document

An 'easy read' summary describing LINks is also being prepared in a variety of formats and more information about these will be made available in future editions of this bulletin.

NHS Centre for Involvement – contributions from all those involved preparation for LINKs

We have received comments from readers of previous bulletins saying that whilst reading about progress from the EAP sites is helpful, it would be interesting to hear about progress being made in other areas of the country as well.

We have discussed this with the NHS Centre for Involvement, and encourage you to submit to the Centre examples of presentations, write ups from events, notable practice and experiences that you have had in preparing for LINKs. At the moment, the Centre can provide you with examples such as the report from the Durham LINKs Early Adopter Stakeholder Event which you can use and adapt to suit your own needs. You can access these by going to www.nhscentreforinvolvement.nhs.uk and clicking on Local Involvement Networks and then 'What's New'. Please note that these examples are not meant to describe how you should be working - they are there to share information on what other people are experiencing.

If you have any documents that you wish to share with colleagues, please email them to nhscentreforinvolvement@warwick.ac.uk with a paragraph which describes the highlights of your submission.

News in brief

The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill

The measures to replace patients' forums with local involvement networks (LINKs) are set out in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill which is currently before parliament. The House of Commons has now completed its consideration of the bill. The Bill was introduced to the House of Lords on the 23rd May, and will now be considered by the second chamber. The date for when the bill will be passed by parliament and become law is subject to the parliamentary timetable, and is therefore uncertain at this stage.

LINKs regional events

To date, five LINKs regional events have taken place in Birmingham, London, Preston, Middlesbrough and York. Whilst evaluations of these events are still being prepared, we are able to report that they are being well received by those who have attended each of these events. A pattern of themes is emerging which indicates that stakeholders are keen to receive more information prior to the establishment of LINKs next year. Examples of cross cutting themes include a need for clear objectives, targets and measures of success in LINKs contracts; guidance on what safeguards are needed to prevent conflicts of interest where LINKs members are also services providers; etc.

The Department's PPI Team will collect all of the write-ups from each of the events and use them to assist in preparing guidance after the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill receives Royal Assent later in the year. In the meantime, the write-ups from each event, along with details of the most common and agreed upon bullet points raised at the workshops will be placed on the Department's website soon.

NHS Choices and voluntary organisations

This June will see the launch of the NHS Choices website, a unique "one-stop shop" of easily accessible information on health and well-being. This will help to empower people to make informed choices about their own health, including when and where they receive treatment.

NHS Choices is a “live” resource, which will grow over time to broaden the range of information available. At its launch, NHS Choices will feature:

- A library of quality-assured clinical information, much of which was previously only available to clinicians
- Topical campaigns and magazine content to encourage healthy lifestyles
- Self-assessment tools and information to help the well to stay fit, and those who are unwell to manage their conditions
- Multi-media guides to common elective procedures
- Searchable directories of hospitals with detailed profiles of services available
- Free-text feedback facility for people to comment on their experiences as an NHS patient

NHS Choices will underpin new and creative approaches to tackling health inequalities, frontline staff will be able to use the new service, extending the reach of information to hidden and disengaged groups who may not have access to computers, and to those who prefer other ways of accessing information.

In June, you will see the first version of what can become one of the most useful health websites in the world. Its full potential will only be realised if it continues to develop with input from the voluntary sector organisations.

If you would like to find out more about NHS Choices, the benefits it provides and how you might become involved in its future development, please contact involve@nhschoices.nhs.uk

Next month’s bulletin

There will be a special feature on LINKs and social care in the next Bulletin.