

## Transitional Arrangements for Local Involvement Networks



### About this guide

This guide is part of a series aimed at helping make LINKs successful. This guide is designed to help Local Authorities understand issues relating to 'transitional arrangements' for supporting LINK activities.

### Background

Links will be set up in England from April 2008 to give communities a stronger voice in how their health and social care services are delivered. Independent networks of local people and groups, LINKs will find out what people want, investigate issues and use their powers to hold services to account.

Each Local Authority (with social services responsibilities) has received funding for LINK activities. Each authority is expected to contract a 'Host' organisation to establish and support a LINK in the Local Authority area. LINKs are independent of any government organisation with their own decision making and governance processes. The Host is accountable to the LINK.

From 1 April 2008 to 30 September 2008, Local Authorities that have not procured a Host organisation to support LINK activities will be in 'transition'.

## Key Points

- Local Authorities have been given funding for LINK activities from 2008/09 to 2010/11.
- Local Authorities have a duty to ensure that LINK activities can take place from 1 April 2008.
- To support LINK activities, Local Authorities must either contract with an independent Host organisation by 1 April 2008 or make 'transitional arrangements'.
- Transitional arrangements can involve either the Local Authority itself acting as a 'temporary Host' for the LINK or appointing another organisation to act as 'temporary Host' until a permanent Host can be appointed.
- Transitional arrangements must end by 30 September 2008 – a dedicated Host organisation must have been contracted by then.
- The most important thing is for Local Authorities to bring local people and groups together to begin to plan LINK activities and carry them out.

## What should Local Authorities have done so far?

One of the key activities that Local Authorities should have well underway is the process of procuring a Host for their local LINK by promoting LINKs to potential Host organisations (particularly voluntary organisations or social enterprises who may be interested in supporting LINKs). Local people and groups should be involved in developing the LINK in order to inform the specification for the Host contract. The majority of Local Authorities are well underway with the procurement process and many are at the point of being able to appoint a Host. The NHS Centre for Involvement has published a guide to procuring a Host (Guide no. 5 in this series). For more detailed guidance on issues to consider when procuring a Host, Local Authorities should refer to the Department of Health's 'Getting Ready for LINKs' guidance documents.

## When should Local Authorities procure a Host?

The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 makes clear that Local Authorities must make arrangements for LINK activities to take place from 1 April 2008. This is to ensure that there is no 'gap' between the abolition of Patient Forums and the start of LINKs. Local Authorities that have not procured a Host by 1 April must make other arrangements to ensure that LINKs activities can take place during a 'transitional phase'. The transitional phase can last up to 30 September whilst the Local Authority tries to find a suitable Host organisation.

In practice, this could be achieved by maintaining the support currently being facilitated by the Local Authority LINK Lead and building on existing community engagement activity. In other words, encouraging local people, community, patient and user organisations to come together and form a core embryonic group of what could eventually become the LINK. Many Local Authorities have already developed 'getting ready for LINKs' working groups that can be supported to function as a LINK in the interim.

The Government published Regulations about transitional arrangements on 5 March 2008 ([http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2008/uksi\\_20080528\\_en\\_1](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2008/uksi_20080528_en_1)).

## **Does the Local Authority have to act as ‘transitional Host’?**

No, an alternative to the Local Authority providing support would be for another independent organisation to be contracted to facilitate LINK activities during the transition period.

## **What activities should be undertaken in the transitional phase?**

It will take time to establish effective LINKs, but in transitional areas Local Authorities (or other transitional Hosts) can help emerging LINKs take a number of steps to help them get going. These include:

- deciding governance and accountability arrangements – agreeing roles and responsibilities within the LINK and accountability to the wider LINK membership;
- setting clear aims – LINKs are expected to ask every section of the community for their views and experiences, particularly providing a platform to those who might not often have their voice heard; LINKs will be more successful if everyone involved has a shared vision;
- encouraging a broad membership – Local Authorities need to ensure that their “getting ready” activities involve a wide cross-section of the population, particularly involving recipients of social care services, and carers, not just health care groups;
- agreeing first priorities – priorities should be determined from feedback from local people and groups across health and social care; Patients Forums will be abolished in March, but their previous priorities should be considered alongside those of all other groups engaged within the LINK;
- developing policies and procedures – including making decisions about priorities for the work plan, a code of conduct about LINK ‘enter and view’ powers, handling conflicts of interest and whether volunteers will be paid expenses;
- mapping existing activity – creating a community profile, including ‘easy to ignore’ individuals and groups to identify – and avoid duplicating – what is already happening in the community to find out what works and where gaps exist;
- developing an engagement plan – raising awareness of the LINK, creative mechanisms for community engagement and participation, together with relationship building with key local stakeholders, such as commissioners and providers; and
- agreeing a LINK work plan – ensuring that there is a clear mechanism for setting priorities for the work programme, remembering that LINKs are about health and social care.

In areas where Local Authorities are in transition, LINKs will need to be supported to undertake these initial activities. Their activities should be carefully documented, ready to be handed over to the proper LINK once it is established.

March 2008

## Can Patient Forums play a role in transitional arrangements?

Patients Forums will be abolished in March 2008. This means that Forums and former Forum members will no longer have statutory powers or responsibilities. Some Local Authorities have asked if Forums can be supported to continue their work during a transitional phase. Patients Forums will be abolished and Forums and former members will have no official functions. Forums cannot therefore continue beyond March 2008. Also, LINKs powers cover health and social care and it is important to bring together local people and groups from a wider perspective than Forums.

People who have been involved in Forums will be able to take part in the temporary arrangements, along with others, although their status will be the same as everyone else involved. One of the aims behind LINKs is to provide more people with the chance to shape local care services. Clearly, people who have been involved in Forums will be well placed to contribute to the setting up of LINKs, but LINKs are to be formed of a much wider base.

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[www.nhscentreforinvolvement.nhs.uk](http://www.nhscentreforinvolvement.nhs.uk)

A simple explanation of LINKs  
[www.direct.gov.uk/localinvolvementnetworks](http://www.direct.gov.uk/localinvolvementnetworks)

Lessons from nine 'Early Adopter' projects around England  
<http://www.nhscentreforinvolvement.nhs.uk/docs/EAPS%20final%20report.pdf>

Information about Government policy  
[www.dh.gov.uk/patientandpublicinvolvement](http://www.dh.gov.uk/patientandpublicinvolvement)

## Further information

The Department of Health has published documents that provide information and guidance about contracting a Host:  
[http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH\\_077266](http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_077266)

The Local Involvement Networks Regulations 2008  
[http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2008/uksi\\_20080528\\_en\\_1](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2008/uksi_20080528_en_1)

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<b>Policy</b>	Estates Commissioning IM & T Finance Social Care / Partnership Working
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<b>Document Purpose</b>	For Information
<b>ROCR Ref:</b>	<b>Gateway Ref:</b> 9607
<b>Title</b>	Local Involvement Networks (LINKs) Guide No.7 - Transitional Arrangements
<b>Author</b>	NHS Centre for Involvement
<b>Publication Date</b>	11 Mar 2008
<b>Target Audience</b>	Local Authority LINK Leads
<b>Circulation List</b>	
<b>Description</b>	This guide is part of a series aimed at helping LINKs become established. This guide is designed to help Local Authorities understand issues relating to 'transitional arrangements' for supporting LINK activities.
<b>Cross Ref</b>	Getting Ready for LINKs - Planning Your Local Involvement Network Getting Ready for LINKs - Procuring a Host Organisation
<b>Superseded Docs</b>	N/A
<b>Action Required</b>	N/A
<b>Timing</b>	N/A
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