

Local Involvement Networks

Bulletin



Issue 12 – April 2008 Gateway ref: 9773

About this bulletin

Welcome to the Local Involvement Networks (LINKs) Bulletin

This bulletin has been developed to help keep you up to date with the latest developments for LINKs. It is produced by the NHS Centre for Involvement on behalf of the Department of Health.

This publication will be of particular interest to:

- LINK participants;
- voluntary and community sector organisations;
- Host organisations who are supporting LINKs;
- Health and social care professionals;
- local government staff working on user involvement and the setting up of LINKs;
- members of Health Overview and Scrutiny Committees; and
- health and social care regulators.

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

This Issue

This Issue	1
News in brief	2
Progress report on transition to Local Involvement Networks	2
Advice to help LINKs get going	2
Code of conduct to be produced for LINKs representatives	2
Healthcare Commission and Commission for Social Care Inspection	3
Public Accountability and Empowerment – A New Era for Scrutiny.....	3
You ask.....	3
Why haven't the Government funded a national body for LINKs?	3
You share	4
Torbay Council has recently appointed the Host for its LINK	4
In focus	5
Building trust in LINKs – Why do we need a Code of Conduct?.....	5
Further information	6
Contact us.....	6

News in brief

Progress report on transition to LINKs

Polling by the Local Government Association (LGA) has found that, of the 137 Local Authorities that responded, just under 90% expect to have appointed a Host organisation by the end of July.

Local Authorities that have not yet successfully contracted with a host organisation should make arrangements to ensure that LINKs activities may still be carried out.

Under the legislation for LINKs, Local Authorities have a six-month window in which to employ a Host organisation to set up and support their local network.

Known as the 'transitional duty', this period lasts until 30 September 2008.

Advice to help LINKs get going

The NHS Centre for Involvement has continued to publish information to help Local Authorities and Hosts set up their Local Involvement network.

Guides published this month:

- Guide No. 10 – Setting a work programme
- Guide No. 11 – Transparency and Accountability

As the Centre continues to produce guides they will be available at www.nhscentreforinvolvement.nhs.uk.

Helpdesk

The helpdesk at the Centre has answered over 100 queries about LINKs and continues to receive more everyday.

If you have questions regarding LINKs please contact us on 024 7615 0705 or via email at info@links.nhs.uk.

LINKs Exchange

A new web resource, called [LINKs exchange](#), has been launched to help those implementing Local Involvement Networks.

The LX network aims to help LINKs access the latest advice and guidance, as well as enabling the sharing of best practice.

Based on the award winning Patient-Citizen Exchange, the site includes a resources library, a news and events section, as well as a forum where LINKs can discuss issues.

Additional features that are planned to be in place by the end of May include a regular e-newsletter, as well as access to an archive of Patients' Forums' national and local learning.

Local Authority LINK Leads have already been given access to the site and Hosts will be provided with access as they are appointed.

LX network will also be used in the future to help coordinate the collation of LINK annual reports.

If you are a professional involved in helping to establish a LINK and would like to register with the site, please visit www.lx.nhs.uk.

Code of conduct to be produced for LINKs representatives

The Department of Health in partnership with NHS Centre for Involvement is in the process of producing a Code of Conduct for authorised LINKs representatives.

The Code will provide guidance on some of the key issues that LINKs representatives need to take into account when entering and viewing services.

LINKs Bulletin – April 2008

To find out more about why a Code of Conduct is important read 'In Focus' on page 5.

Healthcare Commission and Commission for Social Care Inspection

The HCC and CSCI are planning a series of regional briefing workshops between June and November of this year. The events will give the organisations a chance to meet LINKs representatives, to explain their work and discuss how LINKs members might want to contribute to that work. The first meeting is being held at the Healthcare Commission in London on 4 June; subsequent meetings will be planned based on feedback and advice from the initial event.

Please contact Jasmine Miller by emailing: jmiller@opm.co.uk if you would like to register for the 4 June workshop.

Healthcare Commission

At the end of May the Healthcare Commission will be launching a website which will provide guidance and information on how to contribute to the annual health check and to provide regular feedback on patient experience.

The site will be targeted at LINK Leads and Host organisations, as well as overview and scrutiny committees and foundation trust boards of governors.

The Commission will be contacting the Local Authority LINK Leads in May to invite them to register as users of the site, which will be called – engagement.healthcarecommission.org.uk.

Commission for Social Care Inspection

The CSCI plans to develop a protocol about how Local Involvement Networks will relate to the CSCI / the Care Quality Commission; this particularly relates to

the visiting role of LINKs. It is being drafted with the help of a small number of LINKs – it will then be shared for wider consultation.

The LINKs Code of Conduct, that is currently being produced, will be a key source for developing this protocol.

Public Accountability and Empowerment – A New Era for Scrutiny

This will be the largest conference this year dedicated to issues of scrutiny and public accountability.

As part of the Centre for Public Scrutiny's ongoing support for the implementation of LINKs in partnership with the NHS Centre for Involvement, specific workshops will be run for the LINKs audience. To further support this audience, the CfPS is providing a free place to one LINKs member every time a LINKs Host books a place.

The two workshops for LINKs participants are:

- Building Relationships for Locally Accountable Health and Social Care
- Strategic Commissioning and Holding Commissioners to Account

For more information visit: www.cfps.org.uk/conference

You ask

Why hasn't the Government funded a national body for LINKs?

The focus of the drive to strengthen patient, user and public voice is local – local people and communities influencing their local services. It is for this reason that most of the Government funding made available to support Patient and

LINKs Bulletin – April 2008

Public Involvement in health and social care has been allocated directly to Local Authorities to fund LINKs.

However, this does not mean that LINKs should not collaborate. It is likely that LINKs will develop all sorts of ways of working together, whether on shared areas of interest, working across a region or on a national basis.

The Government has stated that it is up to LINKs to decide how they should work together and it would not be appropriate for Government to specify what these arrangements should look like. The issue of whether there should be a national body for LINKs will be something for LINKs to debate once they are up and running.

You share

Torbay Council has recently appointed the Host for its LINK. Sue Lewis, the Council's Assistant Director, Strategic Commissioning and Performance, explains how they got this far and where they go next...

"We were determined to take a very open, transparent approach to setting up the Torbay LINK," explains Sue. "There were some people around who were feeling bereft at the prospect of losing their PPI Forums. Interacting with these individuals and groups was sometimes tricky but we worked on persuading them that they could influence the fresh way of working by bringing their energy and experience into the new world."

The Torbay "Getting Ready for LINKs" inaugural meeting was held last summer. Invitations were sent to all the key players from the statutory sector, the community and voluntary sector and what were then still PPI Forum members. Everyone

present was invited to become members of the Steering Group, which went on to be set up with 15 members from a wide mix of backgrounds.

It was agreed that part of the £10,000 provided by the Department of Health to support the LINKs process would be used to hold an all day conference to introduce the LINK and to invite people to identify what it was they wanted it to do for them. Torbay also took up an offer from the Centre for Public Scrutiny to speak at the conference and to train the Council's elected members, particularly from Overview and Scrutiny.

The conference was held in November and attended by over 100 people.

"Ensuring that the LINK is fully inclusive is vital to its success, so, for example, we used British Sign Language interpreters to help us achieve this," says Sue.

"Information was available in different formats and could be translated into a variety of languages. It was an extremely successful day, providing a lot of useful information to help us move forward."

The Steering Group continued to meet regularly. In the next step, Torbay Council worked with Devon County Council and Plymouth City Council under the auspices of the Devon Procurement Partnership to find a Host for its LINK.

The partnership agreed to use the European tendering system, OJEU, and the system's design meant that all three organisations could have different Hosts to reflect their local priorities.

An evaluation panel was then set up, including the chair of a local PPI Forum, to evaluate the bids. At the beginning of April, the contract was awarded to Help and Care, a not-for-profit organisation based in the South of England. It is currently seeking staff that will be based in Torbay.

LINKs Bulletin – April 2008

“Our efforts have concentrated on an awareness raising campaign to ensure that the LINK becomes a household name,” says Sue. “We are using columns and advertisements in the local press and putting leaflets in local shops, pharmacies, supermarkets and GP surgeries, encouraging people to get in touch.

“My vision is that in three years time the LINK will be 10,000 people strong and that the people who are part of it will not be just the traditional activists but people from every part of the community. We want people to know that the LINK is there for them and that they can dip in and out of it. And we want them to be confident that any changes to the local health and care system – along with any new services introduced – will have to go through the LINK. We will have no hesitation in using our mandate to make sure that happens.”

In focus

Building trust in LINKs – Why do we need a Code of Conduct?

The legislation that makes the existence of LINKs possible also requires providers of state-funded care to let designated LINKs representatives enter and view their services under certain conditions. This ability to ‘enter and view’ services – along with the other LINKs powers – has been put in place to help LINKs hold local services to account.

However, with power comes the responsibility to exercise it appropriately and this is why a Code of Conduct for LINKs representatives is in the process of being developed.

Concerns of providers

Some care providers have told the Government that they are concerned that the power to enter and view could have

negative implications. Fears expressed by providers include:

- LINK members repeatedly turning up at their premises expecting to look round without prior warning or explanation about the purpose of their visit;
- LINK members publishing negative reports about services that are based either on guesswork or that offer little in terms of constructive criticisms; and
- visits by untrained representatives potentially compromising the dignity and privacy of service users.

Although these fears are unlikely to be realised they can be avoided if LINKs and services build a constructive relationship from the start. LINKs are a key mechanism through which the views and experiences of people using services can be channelled to providers to inform continuous quality improvement. It is important therefore that care providers and LINKs can work closely together in a spirit of partnership to ensure that services meet people’s needs and expectations.

The Department of Health believes it is critical that LINKs ‘enter and view’ powers are appropriately used and that visits are only undertaken by authorised LINKs representatives. To ensure that trust is built between LINKs and care providers a ‘Code of Conduct’ for visits is being developed in consultation with stakeholders.

The Code will draw upon existing good practice, and will be informed by experiences and perspectives from people who use services, regulators, and voluntary and community sector groups.

The Code will set out the expectations, requirements, and rights and responsibilities of both the authorised LINK representatives and those receiving visits. The aim of this document is to ensure that the process and experience of visits is positive and constructive. The

LINKs Bulletin – April 2008

Code will stipulate that LINK representatives must carry official identification that confirms they have received the appropriate training and checks and therefore gives them the required authorisation to undertake visits.

The Code will act as a framework to underpin appropriate and effective practice ensuring that visits are conducted in a spirit of openness and partnership and that the relationship between the LINK, the provider and the wider population remains positive and constructive.

Amongst other things the Code will set out the rationale for, and purpose of, the visit, practical arrangements, appropriate personal conduct and behaviours, and the rights and responsibilities of both LINKs representatives and those being visited. It will also emphasise the need for observations and recommendations made by LINKs following the visit to be proportionate, reasonable and constructive including good aspects of the service. Arrangements for sharing recommendations with providers and making recommendations public will also be covered.

Under current plans, the Code is expected to be published early in the summer.

Further information

To get advice and support on establishing LINKs call: 024 7615 0266 or visit: www.nhscentreforinvolvement.nhs.uk.

To find out more about LINKs policy visit: www.dh.gov.uk/links

To get more Patient and Public Involvement resources visit: www.library.nhs.uk/ppi.

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: info@links.nhs.uk or contact the NHS Centre for Involvement on 024 7615 0266.