

Local Involvement Networks

Bulletin



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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.

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Voice piece

Penny Spice, Head of Public Involvement, Nottinghamshire County Teaching PCT, looks forward to LINKs improving democracy and accountability in the NHS

The Carers Federation has recently been appointed to Host the Nottinghamshire County LINK. We are already feeling very positive about the future. Early communications demonstrate the organisation's enthusiasm for working closely with all parties involved in setting up the network. The process will not be prescriptive – it will lie very much with members to decide what the LINK looks like, how it will work and what its initial focus will be. Sometimes a lack of 'prescription' can create frustration, but in this case I am confident that it will provide the freedom and creativity for the LINK to align itself to local needs.

There is a wealth of experience and information already out there in the voluntary sector, which can be harnessed to help reach the seldom heard groups. It is time to focus on those people who are not customarily engaged with the health service and working closely with voluntary groups is the way to reach them.

We have a very mixed economy in Nottinghamshire, including rural communities, which suffer from lack of services and access to services and some big towns. The county is also still dealing with the demise of the coal mining industry. The benefits that the flexibility of a LINK can bring will be demonstrated in its ability to respond sensitively to the needs of these very different communities. In a huge geographical area with such diverse needs, one homogenous organisation is not what is

required. Our Host is already looking at creating a presence in different localities.

The extra powers invested in LINKs will help create welcome democratic debate. Until now there has been a deficit of democracy in the NHS. LINKs will start to put that right. By upping engagement, we can make health services much more accountable. They will now need a mandate from members of the public before they spend tax payers' money!

Our PCT is busy setting up engagement structures and processes to improve and modernise public engagement so that the LINK can request information, register concerns and get prompt responses. We are very optimistic about creating an excellent working relationship with our LINK. We have already built up a lot of good will in the community and in the voluntary sector. With its resources and mandate, the LINK will further develop this, establishing a strong local voice about how we spend public money. I think we can also look forward to seeing the LINK challenging health inequalities and making sure that the best health and social care is fairly accessed by all.

News in brief

Guides on governance and volunteering published

Two new guides to help LINKs get going have been published this month – one covering governance arrangements for LINKs, the other providing advice on working with volunteers.

Good governance structures will be important for LINKs if they are to comply with the law, be accountable and operate effectively. The guide from NHS Centre for Involvement outlines why governance structures are important discusses the role of different stakeholders and

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provides advice on setting up the right structures.

People working in an unpaid capacity will be important to the success of LINKs. The guide to working with volunteers provides advice on how to support this group and ensure the correct relationship.

To access, these and other guides from NCI visit:
www.nhscentreforinvolvement.nhs.uk/LINKsguides/

Help shape future guidance

The Guides produced by the NHS Centre for Involvement have been well received and in high demand.

We are continuing to produce guidance on various issues. However, we would like to know what other areas of guidance on LINKs you would find useful.

Some ideas include:

- how to assess local needs;
- how to map and evaluate current services;
- building relationships with local stakeholders; and
- dealing with conflicts of interest.

Please contact the LINKs helpdesk with your ideas or comments – email info@links.nhs.uk or call 024 7615 0705.

LINKs exchange continues to develop

LINKs exchange, the online community for professionals involved in supporting LINKs continues to develop.

New functionality includes an advance search tool, as well as a regular e-bulletin. If you are a professional involved in helping to establish LINKs, simply register by visiting www.lx.nhs.uk.

New PPI Forum archive launched

Local learning from Patient Forums and national best practice developed by the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health is now available online at the LINKs exchange website (www.lx.nhs.uk).

This archive is available to everyone; you do not need to be a member of the LINKs exchange. It includes Annual Reports, monitoring visit reports and best practice documents produced by the Patients' Forums during the four years they were up and running.

You access the archive by simply using the search tool on the left hand side of the LINKs exchange home page.

The documents are indexed by Local Authority area. This archive enables LINK Leads and Hosts to access information produced for NHS Trusts and PCTs that fall within their Local Authority area.

Lord Darzi report flags importance of engagement

Health Minister Lord Darzi has issued five pledges on how the NHS will handle changes to services – including the pledge 'you will be involved'.

Lord Darzi's report 'Leading Local Change' comes ahead of his final report on the next stage of NHS reform.

This new report, aimed at the public, patients and staff, signals that whilst the NHS must never back away from necessary change to improve services and save lives, there should be important checks which any change has to undergo before it proceeds. The five pledges on change in the NHS, which PCTs will have a duty to have regard to included:

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1. Change will always be to the benefit of patients. This means that change will improve the quality of care that patients receive – whether in terms of clinical outcomes, experiences, or safety.
2. Change will be clinically driven. We will ensure that change is to the benefit of patients by making sure that it is always led by clinicians and based on the best available clinical evidence.
3. All change will be locally-led. Meeting the challenge of being a universal service means the NHS must meet the different needs of everyone. Universal is not the same as uniform. Different places have different and changing needs – and local needs are best met by local solutions.
4. You will be involved. The local NHS will involve patients, carers, the public and other key partners. Those affected by proposed changes will have the chance to have their say and offer their contribution. NHS organisations will work openly and collaboratively.
5. You will see the difference first. Existing services will not be withdrawn until new and better services are available to patients so they can see the difference.

To find out more visit:

www.ournhs.nhs.uk.

Update on transitional duty

The six-month transitional duty, that Local Authorities have to contract an organisation to support LINK activities in their area, finishes on the 30th September 2008.

Currently the majority of authorities who we have spoken with have said they think that they will not breach this legal duty.

The NCI and Local Government Association are continuing to work with councils to ensure they have the support they need to meet the 30th September deadline. Authorities that believe they may not contract with a Host organisation before the end of September are recommended to contact the Local Government Association or the NHS Centre for Involvement.

Regulators launch handbook for LINKs

The Healthcare Commission, in partnership with the Commission for Social Care Inspection, are starting a programme of work in early June to help LINKs understand the role of the regulators and establish how they can best work together in the future.

A series of joint regional events are planned and the Healthcare Commission have produced a handbook containing information, guidance and good practice for networks.

Further information for LINKs will be made available via LINKs exchange.

You ask

Is there a national LINKs identity?

Not at the moment but we believe that the success of LINKs will depend in part on their ability to communicate what a LINK exists to do, the ways people can get involved and how doing this can make a difference – either to them personally or to their community.

This is why the Department of Health is funding a project to help LINKs establish a common visual identity that LINKs can tailor and use to build recognition and trust, as well as a communications toolkit

that LINKs can use to engage their communities.

To kick start this work a survey has been launched asking for the views of LINKs exchange members and the LINKs they support called 'Building a shared vision, values and identity'.

Can transitional LINKs 'enter and view' without the Code of Conduct?

We have had a few queries concerning LINKs entering and viewing health and social care premises and some of you have specifically asked if LINKs are now able to conduct visits.

If a LINK has followed the provisions contained in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 and both sets of LINKs regulations, it is possible for a LINK to begin visiting care settings. However, we would encourage Hosts and LINKs to see visits in the context of the core activities of a LINK. Visits are just one way for a LINK to gather intelligence and an understanding of a service and they should be clear about the purpose of a visit before it is embarked upon. We are currently finalising the Code of Conduct and hope to make it available to LINKs next month.

You share

Kath Soanes, LINKs Operations Manager, Carers Federation, shares her aspirations for LINKs following the organisation's appointment as Host to the networks in 12 Local Authority areas.

"We are thrilled with our appointment as Host for LINKs because we are convinced that the networks will really make a difference to the design and delivery of

social and health services nationwide," says Kath. "LINKs fit neatly with the ethos of our organisation, which is to be community driven and to help give people what they want, rather than what service providers think they need."

"In recent years we have worked closely with a number of PPI Forums across the East and West Midlands and Yorkshire and Humber regions, and are aware both of the good practice arising from their work and of the challenges they faced. LINKs address some of the limitations of PPI Forums, which included the difficulties they had in being truly representative of all of the community. Some of the obstacles which stood in the way of their work, such as inflexible governance processes, have also been removed."

Kath says that the prospect of playing Host to LINKs was attractive because the role fit well into the framework of services already provided by the Carers Federation, without presenting any conflict of interest. In June 2007 it began the process of looking at what the organisation had achieved over the past 15 years or so and gathering testimonials and case studies together in readiness for making its tenders to Local Authorities.

The Carers Federation has now been appointed Host for 12 LINKs countrywide, including Nottingham and Nottinghamshire, Leicester City, Middlesbrough, Wigan, Blackburn with Darwen and Shropshire. A number of other tenders are ongoing.

In the short term, the Carers Federation is working with local embryonic LINKs to get models for LINKs, governance arrangements, terms of reference, decision making processes and early work plan items out for consultation. The organisation is already in the process of appointing community engagement workers and specialist researchers in

each area, as well as establishing local premises.

“We are also working hard to get development groups in place during this transition period,” says Kath. “We are holding events to get ideas of who would like to be involved and to get a mandate for the work to take forward to form the LINK in these early stages. We are additionally looking to realise the benefits associated with being a charity – and one of these is to put in funding bids to boost the finances available to LINKs.

“In the longer term our key aspiration is to realise the potential for a far stronger local voice to be heard and to really effect change for the community. We want to ensure that everybody has the opportunity to be heard and that the seldom heard voices, in particular, come through. Each LINK will reflect the needs of the community it represents, which are often very different even within the various geographical areas of the same Local Authority boundary. The idea of ‘one size fits all’ will be consigned to the past.”

In focus

Patients and the public having a greater say in the NHS through the latest technology – Sam Hudson from the NHS Institute for Innovation and Improvement explains why.

In 2007 the NHS Institute for Innovation and Improvement commissioned Involve to explore the ways the public, patients and staff can use technology such as telephones, television and the internet, to take part in health services. As well as trying to understand how people could be involved in their own healthcare, such as finding information on services or health related issues, the NHS Institute also

wanted to explore how technology can be used to enable people to shape services.

This work has resulted in an online practical guide to how technology can be used easily and flexibly by individuals, perhaps quite literally from their own ‘armchair’.

The site (www.institute.nhs.uk/armchair) will help you to choose what sort of technology to use to involve people and includes:

- descriptions of different types of technology;
- interactive examples of where technology is been used to involve and engage people in health; and
- the benefits and potential pitfalls of using technology to engage people.

In addition, there are opportunities for you to contribute your views and share examples of using technology to engage people.

The report makes a number of recommendations including the need to build up an evidence base of the benefits of participation using technology, a joined-up approach to focus effort in this area, learning from other sectors and the use of technology to support informed decisions and personalisation.

The research shows that when planning it is essential that health services involve people in deciding which technology they use and how they use it. Technology can enhance the patient journey and gives health services a new way of finding out what people think of services and how things can be improved. For example, health services can use existing online discussion groups or create their own, they can use mobile phones for appointment reminders and to seek feedback on services.

Involve found that it is important for technology to compliment existing interactions rather than replacing them –

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traditional forms of communication and involvement are still essential. The authors also believe that the digital divide and inequalities of access to technology should remain an important consideration when designing information pathways. Using the right mix of new and traditional materials including mobile phones, mass media and face to face when required should help the minimisation of such inequalities where possible.

In developing this work key thinkers and leading experts from health, information, television, multimedia, horizon-scanning, telecommunications and service design have come together to discuss what today and tomorrow's world looks like. The future possibilities for participatory technologies look very exciting and there is a great deal of enthusiasm across the NHS for using these tools to reach people, better understand their opinions and to encourage involvement in service improvement. It is this energy for improvement that Armchair Involvement hopes to capture and inspire.

A-Z of Armchair Involvement

The report explains each of the following tools, highlights examples and cites the benefits and risks of each approach.

- avatars
- connected mass deliberation
- digital interactive television
- electronic patient record
- email
- information kiosks
- language accessibility tools
- mass media
- multimedia and web based decision tools
- multimedia messaging (MMS)
- on demand
- online discussion groups
- online surveys and quizzes
- PACS
- PDA/smartphone
- social software
- telephone – voice

- text messaging
- user generated online content
- user-led ratings websites
- video conferencing
- VoIP
- websites
- wireless monitoring sensors

To find out more visit:

www.institute.nhs.uk/armchair.

Dates for the diary

Centre for Public Scrutiny

Public Accountability and Empowerment
– A New Era for Scrutiny

10 June 2008, London

For more information visit:

www.cfps.org.uk/conference

Care Services Improvement Partnership

A series of regional LINKs exchange events for Hosts have been organised.

16 June 2008, North East

16 June 2008, South West

18 June 2008, Yorkshire and Humber

24 June 2008, West Midlands

25 June 2008, East Midlands

26 June 2008, North West

1 July 2008, Eastern

2 July 2008, London

2 July 2008, South East

To find out more check out the calendar section on LINKs exchange

www.lx.nhs.uk.

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

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