

# Getting ready for LINKs

## *Local Involvement Networks Bulletin*

Issue 9 – Jan 2008 Gateway ref: 9420

## 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 on plans to introduce LINKs.

This bulletin will be of particular interest to:

- > NHS staff involved in Patient & Public Involvement, especially PPI leads
- > Local Government staff working on user involvement and the procurement of 'host' organisations for LINKs
- > Voluntary and community sector organisations who 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
- > Patients' Forum members

- > Health and social care regulatory bodies with PPI interests
- > Members of Health Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

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

Voice piece .....	2
News in brief .....	2
Support to help LINKs "get going" .....	2
Next steps on consultation and LINKs regulations .....	3
New community engagement guide ...	3
LINKs promotion worker .....	4
You ask .....	4
"Will LINKs' powers apply to children's services?" .....	4
"What about indemnity?" .....	4
You share .....	4
Update from Cambridgeshire .....	4
In focus .....	5
Transitional duty explained .....	5
Further information .....	7
Contact us .....	7

## Voice piece

***Councillor David Rogers, Chair of the Local Government Association's Community Well-being Board, explains why LINKs will be high on the priority list of local politicians***

This year, and particularly the next few months, will be an important time for LINKs as councils procure Host organisations and the networks themselves take shape. I am confident that we will have stronger, better and more integrated citizen involvement in health and social care as a result.

For local authorities, LINKs are an opportunity to strengthen local decision-making by involving groups and individuals from new and existing communities. As one council colleague put it: "LINKs give us a unique opportunity to listen to young people, busy working people and people from newly arrived communities - those who are seldom heard and even more rarely heeded."

LINKs also have the potential to make it easier to engage with the many local citizens and user groups as well as voluntary and community organisations who want to help local authorities improve social care services.

Many authorities are already making great progress with planning their LINK. The process of procuring Host

organisations is advanced in many areas and authorities in others are working together as a consortium to take their LINK forward. This is encouraging and testament to the dedication of staff who are keen to get LINKs up and running. On behalf of colleagues at the LGA, I would like to offer my thanks for all your efforts.

It is crucial that we maintain our momentum this year and I am certain that local government, in partnership with the NHS and the local community, will rise to the challenge.

I know this year will involve a lot of hard work but I do hope you find it exciting and rewarding.

## News in brief

### Latest developments on LINKs

#### Support to help LINKs "get going"

The Department of Health has asked the NHS Centre for Involvement (NCI) to take the lead in developing advice, guidance and support for LINKs.

Three phases of support have been identified:

- > Getting Ready - January to March 2008
- > Getting Going - April 2008 to March 2009
- > Getting Better - April 2009 to March 2011

In the first phase, there will be an emphasis on guidance, advice and

support for local authorities and emerging Hosts, together with commentaries on 'what LINKs mean for you' for communities and health and social care managers.

Local authorities will be encouraged to build community development principles into their arrangements for LINKs so that Hosts have the right skills to create inclusive, diverse and effective LINKs. NCI has begun regular surveys of local authority LINK leads to get an idea of progress.

The aim is also to have guidance around the remit of LINKs in social care and children's services.

In addition to this regular bulletin, future support from the NCI is likely to include:

- > A help-desk to answer common questions and queries
- > An on-line community to make it easier for LINKs to access information and talk to each other
- > Guidance covering the challenges that LINKs may face (for example: techniques for engaging communities)
- > 'Off the shelf' policies and procedures that LINKs can adapt to suit their needs
- > Continued support from 'Expert Advisors' during key stages.

If you have a question about LINKs please call T 024 7615 0266.

## Next steps on consultation and LINKs regulations

The public consultation period for LINKs Regulations closed on 21 December 2007. The Department received over 300 responses from a range of health, social care, voluntary sector and patient involvement stakeholders. A full Government response to the consultation will be published later in the spring.

The regulations on which the Department consulted related to the ability of LINKs to enter and view premises, to access information, as well as their referral and reporting rights.

Two other key issues requiring secondary legislation are governance and transition arrangements. As discussed in Parliament, these regulations are not subject to a formal, public consultation process. However, the Department has discussed them with key stakeholders.

For further information on the transitional duty, see "In Focus" on page 5.

## New community engagement guide

Community engagement with a particular focus on engaging seldom-heard communities is the focus of new Department of Health guidance.

['A dialogue of equals'](#) is designed to help NHS and social care

organisations improve decision-making and service provision by consulting, involving and truly engaging with communities.

To download the report visit:

[http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH\\_082382](http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_082382)

## LINKs promotion worker

LINKs offer new opportunities to voluntary and community sector organisations – in fact they are central to the whole idea of LINKs. To encourage these sectors to engage with LINKs, the LTCA (Long Term Conditions Alliance), part of the NHS Centre for Involvement, is making a LINKs Promotion Worker available to discuss the networks at their meetings and events.

To find out more, or to book the promotion worker to take part in an event, please contact LTCA:  
Email: [info@ltca.org.uk](mailto:info@ltca.org.uk)  
Telephone: 020 7813 3637

## You ask

### Questions from the front-line

#### “Will LINKs’ powers apply to children’s services?”

LINKs’ powers will apply to children’s health services but not children’s social care services. This is because the Government believes that there are other appropriate mechanisms already in place, which scrutinise and oversee children’s social care and seek the views of children and young

people in the development of their services.

LINKs will need to know more about this issue and further guidance is will be produced by the NCI.

#### “What about indemnity?”

It will be for local authorities to determine their own policies regarding LINKs and indemnity. Authorities may choose to indemnify certain LINKs’ members directly or stipulate that host organisations must make arrangements to do so as part of their LINKs’ contracts.”

## You share

### Best practice from the front-line

#### Update from Cambridgeshire

Gill Prangnell, Policy and Diversity Manager, describes the steps Cambridgeshire County Council has taken so far to prepare for LINKs

Initial preparations for Cambridgeshire LINKs began about a year ago with the identification of a team of four to lead on policy, procurement and scrutiny. Following an initial meeting with some of the local PPI Forum leads and attendance at a Department of Health “Getting Ready for LINKs” event, a small group got together to plan a stakeholder event.

“The county’s PPI Forums have always been very proactive and, along with Cambridgeshire Action with Communities in Rural England

(ACRE), they were key to helping us access the right people to attend our stakeholder event,” Gill Prangnell, Policy and Diversity Manager, explains. “We were keen to attract a wide range of people from both the community and voluntary sector.”

The event was advertised on a new LINKs section of the County Council’s website, set up under Health and Social Care. Personal invitations were also sent out through community and voluntary groups. This strategy proved highly effective and over 100 people, representing more than 50 organisations, attended the event at St Ives on 19 November.

“An expert adviser on LINKs from the Centre for Public Scrutiny helped us manage the stakeholder event. She described to delegates what was happening nationally and what the Early Adopter Sites had achieved so far. We then broke up into workshops to consider key questions, such as ‘How will we access difficult to reach groups?’, ‘What will LINKs look like?’ and ‘How will we know if the network is functioning well?’

“Delegates proved to be very open-minded and the event went extremely well. We were able to agree interim arrangements to progress work and to ensure that PCTs and Social Care are kept in the loop.”

The next step was setting up a Working Group to lay the foundations for LINKs and an inaugural meeting took place pre-Christmas 2007.

Currently, the Working Group comprises 25 members who have agreed to work in four sub-groups, each focusing on a different task – procurement, communication, mapping and collection of ‘best practice’ from PPI Forums.

The sub-groups will report back progress to the wider group at the planned monthly meetings. As Gill explained - “The Working Group wants to be as inclusive as possible, so it is key for us to broaden representation and to communicate widely. Next steps include raising awareness of LINKs in preparation for the procurement of a Host. Watch this space!”

## In focus

### Transitional duty explained

Under legislation that comes into force on 1 April 2008, local authorities which have not successfully made arrangements for LINKs activities to be carried out must make other arrangements to ensure that LINKs activities still take place during a transitional phase that could last up to six months.

In practice, this could be achieved by maintaining the support currently being facilitated by the local authority LINK leads 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.

Under transitional arrangements, local authorities will need to ensure that they facilitate the provision of effective support to this core group to enable it to function as a LINK. Most importantly, the group will need to be supported in developing robust governance arrangements and in carrying out activities related to the powers of LINKs.

The regulations and information explaining what they mean will be published by the Department of Health. The document will outline key aspects of the governance arrangements that will need to be in place to ensure that LINKs operate in a transparent and visibly accountable way. This guidance will focus on ensuring that a LINK agrees transparent procedures for decision-making (including decisions about activities and spending) and for authorising representatives to take part in decision-making and to enter and view care services premises. Ultimately, it will still be for the LINK itself to decide exactly what governance structure is appropriate in its own case and until a Host is contracted it will be for local authorities to facilitate and support the LINK in making appropriate local arrangements.

An alternative to local authority provided support would be for the contracting of an independent organisation to facilitate LINK activities during the transition period.

The NHS Centre for Involvement (NCI) has a lead role in the “getting ready for LINKs” implementation activity and is currently developing a fact sheet for Local Authorities that will discuss transitional arrangements and outline plans to support those authorities to which these arrangements apply. The fact sheet will be available from the NCI shortly.

# Further information

## To find out more about LINKs policy

Visit:

[www.dh.gov.uk/patientpublicinvolvement](http://www.dh.gov.uk/patientpublicinvolvement)

## To find out more about the support for LINKs visit:

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

## To get more Patient and Public Involvement resources

Visit: [www.library.nhs.uk/ppi](http://www.library.nhs.uk/ppi)

## To find out more about current Patient and Public Involvement practice

Visit: [www.cppih.org](http://www.cppih.org)

# Contact us

## Help shape this bulletin

We welcome your ideas and comments to help shape the future format and content of this monthly bulletin. Please email: [ppimailbox@dh.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:ppimailbox@dh.gsi.gov.uk) or write to the PPI Policy Team, Room 502A, Skipton House, 80 London Road, London SE1 6LH.