

## LOCAL INVOLVEMENT NETWORKS

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### Summary

The Local Government and Public and Patient Involvement in Health Act 2007 included the introduction of Local Involvement Networks and the abolition of the Patient and Public Involvement Forums. All Social Services authorities have a duty to make arrangements for a Local Involvement Network to be in place for their geographic area from the 1 April 2008 through the appointment of a Host Organisation.

### Recommendations

- A. Agree delegated authority to the Corporate Director Community Services to enter into a contract appointing a host organisation in consultation with the Portfolio Holder Community Services.
- B. Agree to allocate 95% of funding provided by Government to the successful Host organisation and retain the remainder to cover contract management costs.

### Background

1. The Local Government and Public and Patient Involvement in Health Act 2007 included the introduction of Local Involvement Networks (LINKs) and the abolition of the Patient and Public Involvement Forums.
2. Patient and Public Involvement Forms have been in place since 2003. They were set up for each NHS Trust. In Shropshire there are three forums, one each for the Primary Care Trust, the Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital Trust and the Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Hospital Trust. There is also a Forum for the West Midlands Ambulance Service.
3. LINKs are the next stage in the Governments development of the involvement of patients and the public in health. LINKs reflect a geographic area rather than being associated with a single organisation. They will look at health and adult social care services, enabling the experience of the public, patients and service users to be considered more fully across services and organisations.

## **What are LINKs?**

4. With the exception of the Patient and Public Involvement Forums LINKs do not replace other Voluntary and Community Sector Groups or existing networks. Rather than being an organisation that represents individuals or a group the key role of the LINK is to enable people and organisations to become involved, especially the hard to reach and those who find it hardest to have their voice heard.
5. LINKs are described by Government as a network of networks. They will be a membership body with membership open to any individual or organisation within the area that has an interest in health and/or social care. Government guidance identifies that the main functions of LINKs are:
  - Promoting and supporting the involvement of people in the commissioning provision and scrutiny of their local NHS and adult social care services;
  - Obtaining the views of people about their needs for, and experiences of, local NHS and adult social care services and making these views known to people responsible for commissioning, providing, managing and scrutinising those services;
  - Making reports and recommendations about how local care services could be improved, to people responsible for commissioning, providing, managing or scrutinising those services.
6. LINKs will have set powers. These include:
  - Being able to enter specified Health and Adult Social Care premises and view the services provided as well as collecting the views and experiences of the recipients of services;
  - Request information and receive a response within a specified timescale;
  - Make reports and recommendations and receive a response within a specified timescale; and
  - Refer matters to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee and receive a response.
7. LINKs will not have powers to visit Children Social Care facilities or to receive responses to referrals and recommendations for these services. This role is fulfilled through Ofsted.
8. LINKs are independent of the County Council and from NHS Trusts. They set their own work programmes and decide how they use the resources that are available to them.

## **The role of the County Council**

9. The County Council is under a duty to have a LINK in place from the 1 April 2008. This requires the County Council to make arrangements to contract with a Host Organisation who will support the LINK for three years from April 2008 to March 2011.
10. If the County Council is unable to have a Host in place to support the LINK from the 1 April 2008 it will need to make interim arrangements. The Government have identified a transitional period up to the end of September

2008 by which time all local authorities should have made arrangements with a host organisation.

11. As the contracting organisation the County Council will hold the Host Organisation to account against the requirements set out in the contract. In doing this the County Council will take account of the views of the LINK on the support they have received from the Host. Therefore the Host will also be accountable to the LINK for the support it provides.
12. It will also be important to develop effective arrangements between the Scrutiny Structures and the LINK. This should avoid any duplication in work programme activities, make best use of the respective and mutually supportive powers of the LINK and Scrutiny, and be clear on how referrals will be handled. For example, the power of the LINK to undertake visits and their role of enabling people to bring their views forward can inform the work of Scrutiny, and Scrutiny can use its powers such as being able to hold decision makers and service providers to account to support the LINK by taking up appropriate referrals.

### **Funding the LINK**

13. The Government have allocated each social services authority with funding for their LINK for the three years to March 2011, received as part of the Area Based Grant.

2008/09	£149,657
2009/10	£150,286
2010/11	£150,817

14. This funding has been allocated from the funding for the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement and the Patient and Public Involvement Forums.
15. Previous Government guidance has stated that the funding is to be used to fund the Host Organisation, cover the costs of the LINK as it carries out its role, and to cover the costs of the County Council to manage the contract with the Host Organisation.
16. In line with this split of the funding 5% of the funding should be retained by the County Council to cover the contract management costs and 95% of the funding is passed on to the Host Organisation.

### **What we are doing**

17. In line with best practice we held a Stakeholder event at the Shrewsbury Town Football Club on the 30 October 2007. This was attended by more than 50 people from across the social care services, Health, the Voluntary and Community Sector, Patient and Public Involvement Forums, GP Patient Participation groups, and County Councillors. We have received positive feedback and we are planning to hold another event before 1 April 2008 to which Members will be invited.

18. Following expressions of interest from different groups to be involved in work to prepare for a Shropshire LINK we set up a "Getting ready for LINK" working group. The first meeting was in December and further meetings have been arranged on a monthly basis. The working group is chaired by the interim Corporate Director Community Services and consists of:

- County Council staff with scrutiny and locality working background,
- the Director of the LSP,
- representatives from the PCT including the Director of Corporate Affairs,
- representatives from the VCS,
- representatives from the current Patient and Public Involvement Forums, and
- representatives from the GP Practice Participation Groups

There is an invitation to the Portfolio Holder for Community Services and the Chairman of the Community Services Scrutiny Panel to attend these set-up meetings, and full briefings will be given to these two members and the Chair of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

19. The "Getting ready for LINK" working group is developing arrangements to enable the LINK to begin to fulfil its role from the 1 April 2008 and support the Host Organisation when they start. Whilst it is expected that it will take some time for the LINK to achieve its full potential the aim is to provide a good basis from which it can move on. The work includes;

- identifying an appropriate name that is more meaningful to patients and the public,
- developing a communications strategy,
- establishing the best routes and arrangements for the LINK to have a voice and influence e.g. the best fit with the service delivery, commissioning and decision-making structures such as the Local Strategic Partnership
- looking at appropriate governance arrangements for the LINK,
- looking at how the LINK and Overview and Scrutiny can work together.

20. Notice of the tender for the role of Host Organisation was published in November 2008. Due to the value of the contract we have applied European Union procedures. The closing date for tenders is noon on Friday 18 January 2008 and we aim to award the contract by late February.

**Background Papers**

Local Government & Public Involvement in Health Act 2007  
Getting Ready for LINKs - Contracting a host organisation for your Local Involvement Network, Department of Health  
Getting Ready for LINKs - Planning your Local Involvement Network, Department of Health  
Local Involvement Networks Explained – Department of Health  
Have Your Say – Consultation on Regulations of LINKs – Department of Health

**Human Rights**

The Host organisation and the LINK will need to operate within the requirements of the Human Rights Act.

**Environmental Appraisal**

The Host Organisation and the LINK will need to identify innovative approaches to enable people to be involved in the LINK activity. Part of this will involve finding ways for people to take part without having to travel long distances by car, and to establish effective local as well as area and countywide structures.

**Risk Management Appraisal**

The key risk facing the project is that a host organisation is not appointed by the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2008 in which case interim arrangements will have to be put in place by the Council and a further procurement process started.  
Once appointed the County Council will also performance manage the Host Organisation against the terms of the contract and performance management schedule.  
The funding for LINKs comes as part of the Area Based Grant and is not ring-fenced. It will be important to ensure that this funding remains available to fund the LINK and the Host Organisation.

**Community / Consultations Appraisal**

One of the primary roles of the LINK is to enable people to be involved and have a voice in the planning, commissioning and provision of Health and Social Care services. The LINK will reach out into the community and use appropriate and innovative methods to do this. It will also be able to report finding and recommendations arising from their work, and receive a response.

**Cabinet Member**

Councillor Barbara J Craig

**SCC Local Member**

All

**Appendices**

none

