



Leadership
Engagement
Accountability
Delivery

Listening and responding to communities

A brief guide to Local Involvement Networks

About this document

A Local Involvement Network (LiNK) is being set up in every area* of England to give people a stronger voice in how their local health and social care services are planned and delivered.

This guide for health and social care managers explains more about LiNKs and how they can help you understand the needs of your community.

*Every local authority with a responsibility for social services has a LiNK

What is a LINK?

A LINK is an independent network made up of a mixture of both local individuals and organisations – such as voluntary organisations and community groups.

Each LINK is responsible for finding out what people want from their health and care services – such as hospitals, GPs, care homes and pharmacists. They are also responsible for monitoring the care that services provide and reporting their findings.

To help them do their job, the legislation establishing LINKs also gives them certain powers – such as being able to make visits to health and social care services to see them at work.

By the end of 2008, each area should have its own network.

Because no two areas are the same, each LINK will be different in terms of which priorities it concentrates on. However, each network should build on the work of existing voluntary and community groups rather than trying to replace or replicate them.

Why have LINKs been introduced?

Care staff know that involving communities in decisions about care and listening to their experiences is an essential step to improving services.

The public have also said that they want the opportunity to make more choices about, and to have greater influence over, the services they receive.

The major government policies designed to improve and modernise care reflect this thinking.

LINKs are just one of a number of initiatives that aim to:

- ensure that communities can influence and make choices about services
- help staff, managers and commissioners understand the wishes of patients and service users.

Benefits to your service

Most services already involve people in a number of ways but LINks have the potential to help you build on this activity.

LINks can help

- seek out and listen to the views of more people in your community
- provide richer feedback about what your community needs and wants
- provide a simple one-stop way to engage your community
- avoid duplication of effort
- you prioritise and direct resources towards services that local people value

- inform decisions about the commissioning and running of services

LINks have been set up to help bring about genuine changes to health and social care services. This means working in partnership with health and care staff to maintain and improve on what already exists.

LINKs at work

Planning services of tomorrow*

When Anytown Primary Care Trust (PCT) started to think about a future commissioning strategy, they wanted to ensure that the community was fully involved. This is why the PCT approached the Local Involvement Network.

The LINK agreed to help the PCT engage the community. With funding from the trust, the LINK held a number of open workshops and public meetings, they conducted a survey and they hosted meetings with specific minority groups such as people from the local Polish community.

Through this work, over 2,000 local residents and community groups were involved in the development of the commissioning strategy.

Local people said they wanted more help to stay well. Because of this feedback, Anytown PCT changed the strategy to focus much more on services that prevent ill health and promote physical and mental wellbeing.

*This is a hypothetical example

Key facts about LINKs

- Every local authority with a responsibility for social services has a LINK
- Anyone can join a LINK including individuals and representatives of charities and community groups
- LINKs are independent and not part of Government
- A LINK's remit covers all the health and social care services in an area that are commissioned by the NHS and local authorities
- The only services that are excluded are children's social services
- The remit of a LINK includes independent providers of publicly funded services
- Under the law, LINKs can:
 - ask health and social care commissioners for information about their services and expect a response
 - issue reports or make recommendations about a service and expect a response from commissioners
 - refer matters to the local council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee
 - enter certain services and view the care provided
- Each network is supported by an independent organisation called a host. Government has made £28 million a year available to fund LINKs.

Common questions

How will LINKs work?

LINKs are likely to

- Ask people what they like and dislike about care services
- Seek ideas to help improve services
- Explore specific issues of concern to the community
- Tell those who commission, provide and manage local services what the community thinks
- Carry out visits to services to see them at work

How can people get involved?

It is up to individuals to decide how and when they want to get involved. A LINK should be flexible, providing a number of ways for people to express their views. This may involve taking a few minutes to answer a survey or giving up more time to be part of a working group.

Can I use LINKs to look into issues that affect my service?

The priorities of a LINK should be informed by the views of the community. This would not stop a service commissioning a LINK to do additional work if the network was willing to do this.

Common questions

Can LINKs members enter and view any service?

Only an authorised representative of a LINK can enter and view services and to protect users of services and the smooth delivery of care there are specific safeguards in place. For example: an authorised representative must have undergone a Criminal Records Bureau check, providers have the right to refuse entry if they believe it will interrupt the smooth delivery of care and some premises are exempt.

A code of conduct for LINKs' visits has been produced. To find out more read the 'Further information' section at the end of this document.

Can I join a LINK?

Yes, as long as your involvement does not lead to a conflict of interest. If there is a potential conflict of interest this should be declared to the LINK.

LINKs at work

Helping to address problems*

Local people told Anytown LINK what they liked and disliked about their local services. It was clear that they had concerns about services for older people.

The LINK decided to look into the issue further. As part of this research, the network requested information from the commissioner, they asked the community about their experiences of care and they spoke to local providers. The LINK also conducted visits to care homes and day services and talked to service users and staff.

A report was produced by the LINK, which said that the needs of service users were not always being met. For example, residents of some care

homes reported being woken, dressed and fed by the night staff as they came toward the end of their shift. The motivation was that this way of working was more convenient for the staff rather than letting residents get up when they wanted to.

The report made a number of suggestions about how services for older people could be improved. The LINK sent the report to the commissioner, local providers, the regulator and the council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

After discussions with the LINK, some providers decided to review their practices and the commissioner agreed to implement a number of LINK recommendations.

*This is a hypothetical example

Contacting a LINK

Every person's view or experiences of health and social care is valuable. If you work or manage a service, do tell the people you care for about LINKs.

If you manage or commission health or social care services, it also makes sense to contact your local LINK.

To find out what is happening in your area, contact your local council that has responsibility for social services.

Alternatively visit
www.direct.gov.uk/localinvolvementnetworks

Further information

A range of information has been produced to help LINKs get going and to support the way they work with the NHS and social care services.

This includes support and resources from the NHS Centre for Involvement (www.nhscentreforinvolvement.nhs.uk)

If you manage, provide or commission services you might be particularly interested in:

Code of Conduct for LINKs' visits: To help ensure that these visits by authorised LINKs' representatives are carried out correctly, a code of conduct has been published. Informed by best practice, as well as the views of service users and

providers, the code aims to ensure that visits are proportionate, reasonable and do not impact on the rights of people who use services.

LINKs regulations: To enable LINKs to carry out their role, regulations have been passed by Parliament imposing duties on commissioners and certain providers of health and social care services to respond to LINKs (to requests for information and to reports and recommendations made to them by a LINK) and to allow entry by LINKs to premises under certain conditions.

LINKs Directions: To ensure that independent providers are covered by LINKs, the commissioners of health and social care services have been directed by Government to amend future contracts with independent providers. These amendments relate to allowing LINKs representatives to enter and view services, as well as providing LINKs with information relating to services they might run which are publicly funded.

Further information on these and other resources can be found by visiting

www.dh.gov.uk/links

Notes

Notes



© Crown copyright 2008

290334 1p 3k Sep 08 (FMP)

Produced by COI for the Department of Health

Gateway: 10443

If you require further copies of this title visit

www.orderline.dh.gov.uk and quote:

290334/Listening and responding to communities or write to:

DH Publications Orderline

PO Box 777

London SE1 6XH

Email: dh@prolog.uk.com

Tel: 0300 123 1002

Fax: 01623 724 524

Minicom: 0300 123 1003 (8am to 6pm, Monday to Friday)

www.dh.gov.uk/links



75% recycled

This leaflet is printed
on 75% recycled paper