

Report to: **East Sussex Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC)**

Date: **30 November 2007**

By: **Director of Law and Personnel**

Title of report: **Local Involvement Networks (LINKs) – update report**

Purpose of report: **To update the Committee on progress with establishing a LINK for East Sussex**

RECOMMENDATIONS

HOSC is recommended:

- 1. To consider and comment on the progress in developing an East Sussex LINK.**
 - 2. To consider HOSC's response to the Department of Health's consultation on LINK regulations**
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1. Background

1.1 In September 2007 HOSC noted progress to date in developing a Local Involvement Network (LINK) for East Sussex. LINKs are intended to replace the current system of Patient and Public Involvement Forums (PPIFs) from 1 April 2008. Further details on LINKs are attached at appendix 1 as additional background information.

1.2 East Sussex County Council has a duty to contract with a 'host organisation' which will provide support to the LINK. In September HOSC also agreed to monitor this contracting process and the associated preparations for establishing an East Sussex LINK, particularly to ensure adequate stakeholder involvement in the process.

2. National developments on LINKs

2.1 The legislation required to abolish PPIFs and establish LINKs was contained within the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill. In early November 2007 this Bill gained Royal Assent. It is therefore now certain that LINKs will be established across the country in 2008.

2.2 The Department of Health has announced that it will be making £84m available nationally over 3 years to support the new system of LINKs. The amount of funding which each local area will receive for its LINK has not yet been announced – further information is expected by early December 2007.

2.3 The Department of Health is currently consulting on supplementary regulations regarding LINKs' powers. The consultation document is attached at appendix 2. HOSC may wish to consider whether it wishes to make a response to this consultation and if so, to agree the key points which will constitute that response. The closing date of the consultation is 21 December 2007.

3. Procurement of a 'host organisation' to support the East Sussex LINK

3.1 To help deliver its duty to contract for a host organisation, the County Council has established a steering group bringing together PPIFs, voluntary sector groups, NHS and Social Care representatives to advise on what support the host will need to deliver and how best to manage the procurement process. This group has met twice and is focussed on ensuring the host organisation is in place by 1 April 2008.

3.2 At the beginning of November the County Council published an advert inviting expressions of interest from potential host organisations. The advert was circulated to national and local voluntary sector networks and published on the Council's website. The advert was published ahead of confirmation of the exact amount of local funding due to the tight timescale within which to appoint a host (hosts are expected to be in place by 1 April 2008).

3.3 Interested parties will initially be invited to submit a questionnaire giving details about their organisation and its relevant skills and experience as the first part of a two-part tendering process. The questionnaires will be used by a panel (consisting of Council lead officers and an Older People's Forum member) to shortlist around five organisations who will be invited to proceed to the second stage and submit a full tender.

3.4 Full tenders will be based on a detailed specification of requirements drawn up by the County Council in consultation with the steering group and using local stakeholder feedback (see below) and Department of Health guidance. The development of the specification is the current focus of work for the steering group and the Council lead officers. Tenders received from the shortlisted organisations will be assessed by an expanded panel which, in addition to the members at shortlisting stage, it is hoped will also include a PPIF representative and a representative of a voluntary organisation. The panel will recommend the favoured host organisation.

4. Developing a model for the East Sussex LINK

4.1 Alongside the Council's work on the procurement of a host, the PPIFs covering East Sussex have established a county-wide working group to consider the transition to a LINK and how a LINK could operate.

4.2 One of the working group's key actions has been to organise an event targeted at local voluntary organisations, service users and stakeholders to raise awareness and gather views about how a LINK may work. The event took place on 24 October 2007 and around 80 people attended and contributed their views. The feedback from the event is being used by the Council and the procurement steering group to inform the development of the specification for the host organisation as well as to help the working group develop their thinking on LINKs.

4.3 Following the event, a number of the attendees agreed to join the PPIFs' working group and to work together to consider how a LINK could work in East Sussex, who needs to be involved and what structures could be considered. The work of this group will continue in parallel with the process to appoint a host until 1 April 2008 when the group should be able to begin working with the appointed host to take forward their initial work into a formally established LINK.

5. Recommendation

- 1) To consider and comment on the progress in developing an East Sussex LINK.**
 - 2) To consider HOSC's response to the Department of Health's consultation on LINK regulations**
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Further information on LINKs

In July 2006, the Government signalled its intention to make changes to the structures for patient and public involvement in health. The Department of Health document 'A Stronger Local Voice' announced that the existing Patient and Public Involvement Forums (PPIFs) would be replaced by Local Involvement Networks (LINKs).

What are LINKs?

LINKs are intended to be a wide network of voluntary and community groups and interested individuals who will represent the views of patients and the public on healthcare issues. The key differences from PPIFs are:

- They will have a much larger and wider membership, including groups as well as individuals.
- They will have a remit to look at social care as well as health issues and powers to make recommendations to the Social Care authority as well as the NHS.
- They will be co-terminous with the local social care authority's boundary and look at services commissioned or provided for the residents by any health or social care organisation.
- They will determine their own structure and ways of working tailored to local circumstances and needs, within basic governance requirements set nationally.

What is the role of LINKs?

As the legislation sets out, the LINKs' role will be to:

- promote and support the involvement of people in the commissioning, provision and scrutiny of health and social care services
- obtain the views of people about their needs for, and experiences of, health and social care services and make these views known to those responsible for commissioning, providing, managing or scrutinising those services
- enable people to monitor and review the commissioning and provision of care services
- make reports and recommendations about how health and social care services could be improved, to people responsible for commissioning, providing, managing or scrutinising those services.

What powers do LINKs have?

LINKs will have specific powers to enable them to influence the improvement of local services. These powers will enable them to:

- > enter specified types of premises and view the services provided
- > request information and receive a response within a specified timescale
- > make reports and recommendations and receive a response within a specified timescale
- > refer matters to a HOSC or social care scrutiny committee and receive a response.